

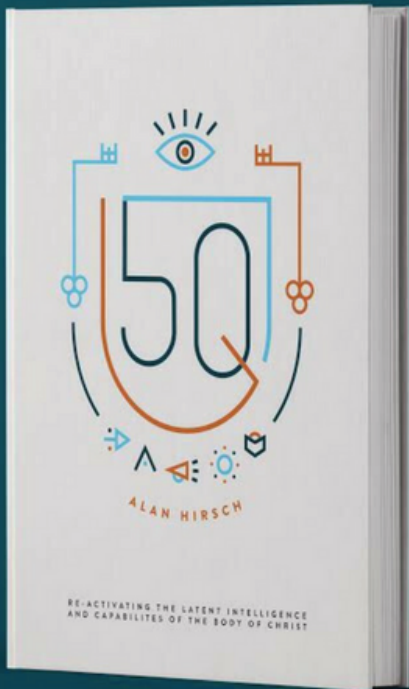


5Q CENTRAL RESOURCES

Foundations for 5Q Thinking



A FREE BRIEFING
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A free excerpt from 5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ

Available this Spring at 5QCentral.com

The purpose of this current chapter is to provide the platform to ensure that we all start the journey on the same page.

While I suspect that many of you are “veterans” in the conversation and are looking for further insights in how to apply APEST thinking, some readers might be coming to this conversation unaware of the remarkable recovery of APEST thinking over the last ten years or so. So I will leave the new content until after I have at least provided a summary of the implications of the Ephesians text, as well as a briefing about the new, distinctly missional paradigm of the fivefold which changes our engagement with it.

- Ephesians 4:1–16: The Key to Activating the Body of Christ

As the heading suggests, we now have to pay attention to the APEST key that unlocks the powerful 5Q system coded into the core of the church’s

being. It is time to provide some contours of the text that is undoubtedly the key to all subsequent fivefold-thinking—Ephesians 4:1–16. In doing this, I will also suggest some broad definitions of APEST so that we can understand what is being referred to.¹

First, I want to restate what Christians have always believed about the authority of the book of Ephesians to define how we are to understand ourselves. We have always treated it as *the* book par excellence on the nature and purposes of the church. It represents best thinking about the church—at least how Paul understood it. Ephesians is the spiritual template for the church in all ages. Certainly, there is a lot of DNA and code written throughout the book.

But like our own genetic code, the book of Ephesians does not so much describe or prescribe a specific cultural form or physical expression of a church. Rather, it presents us with something of the default settings coded in by God on a primordial level. Some have even called this “the invisible church” or, as Eugene Peterson calls it, “the church we cannot see.” The invisible church in this sense is the ever-present, but largely unseen, primordial template that seeks to express itself in the life of every church, both now and throughout history. It needs soft eyes for us to perceive its pressure and to break through our theological blind spots and our ingrained ecclesiological habits. But it is always present, secretly exerting its pressure to conform our expressions of church to the one that Jesus intended in the first place. In getting under the hood of this important book, Peterson notes that:

Ephesians is an inside look at what is beneath and behind and within the church that we do see wherever and whenever it becomes visible. ... [It] provides our best access to what is involved in the formation of church, not so much the way the church appears in our towns and cities, but the essence that is behind the appearances: God’s will, Christ’s presence, the Holy Spirit’s work. This ... is what we simply must get through our heads if we are going to understand and participate rightly in any church that we are part of. This is the only writing in the New Testament that provides us with such a detailed and lively account of the inside and underground workings of the complex and various profusion of “churches” that we encounter and try to make sense of.²

He is absolutely right generally about the whole book, but this must therefore apply equally to Ephesians 4:1–16. This text is weighty precisely because that is exactly how Paul intended it to be read: The language, the grammar, the theme, and the proposed outcomes—all indicate the sheer importance of the text.

Commentators have long-held that Ephesians as a whole is something of the constitutional document of the church.³ Like all constitutions, it is meant to guide all subsequent thinking and action in the organization so constituted. Read it with this in mind; it is meant to define our understanding

of the purpose of God in the church. By extension, constitutional theology ought to define who we are as followers of Christ, how we are to understand ourselves and how we are to direct our affairs in the world.

Here, then, is the text of Ephesians 4:1–16. I have accentuated parts that I think need emphasizing to grasp the significance of the text. I suggest reading it straight through, and then again with a view to the highlights:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the **calling you have received**.² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.³ Make every effort to keep the **unity of the Spirit** through the bond of peace.⁴ **There is one body and one Spirit**, just as you were called to **one hope** when you were called;⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism**;⁶ **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all**.

⁷ **But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it**.⁸ This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to **fill the whole universe**.)¹¹ So Christ himself gave the **apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors [shepherds] and teachers**,

¹² **to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up**¹³ **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**.¹⁴ **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 people in their deceitful scheming.¹⁵ **Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ**.¹⁶ **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**.

We can discern three natural sections within the overall unity of verses 1–16, as follows:

1. Foundations for the Unity of the Church (Ephesians 4:1–6)

The text at the beginning of Ephesians 4 flows out of the famously lofty Pauline prayer for the church in 3:14–21. Here he prays that they might attain to 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 after,

he goes on to appeal to the Ephesians (and to all Christians everywhere) to live consistently with who God is and what he has done in Jesus ... to “live a life worthy of the calling we have received” (4:1). The elevated speech in these verses reflects both the theological significance, as well as the inescapably foundational nature, of the text.

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 (one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all). They provide the root beliefs needed to maintain a common identity as well as a deep unity within the burgeoning and increasingly diverse movement described in the book of Acts. Paul knew that these foundational convictions were needed; any movement experiencing spontaneous expansion will inevitably encounter competing systems of meaning and conflicting claims to loyalty and therefore becomes vulnerable to disunity and conflict.

The marvel of the church is that there is within it so many forces held together in dialectical tension. All that previously divided and separated us—race, identity, gender, slavery, etc.—has been resolved and unified in Christ. The tragic truth is that we have seldom been able to live into this calling as is so evidenced in the all too real racial and gender barriers in the church. But when we don’t strive for unity in the bond of peace, we eventually break apart; we rend the Body, and opt for more convenient reductions of the total truth. The strong appeal of verses 1–16 is that we are not to separate what God has put together. We are to strive for the unity of the Spirit knowing there is one God, one faith, one baptism, etc. And insofar that 1–6 is organically connected with what follows in 7–11, we are not to break APEST up either. In his ascension, Jesus has “given” APEST to the church as its lasting possession. In other words, the fivefold is a part of the church’s inheritance in Jesus. We are to treasure the fivefold precisely because we treasure Jesus and what he is doing through us.

2. *The Ascension Gifting of the Church* **(Ephesians 4:7–11)**

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 Body of Christ.

Putting aside for the moment the theological significance of the ascension reference here (I will return to this in a later chapter), Paul clearly states in verses 7 and 11 that Jesus “gave” APEST to the church, distributing it among all the people as he sees fit. It is vital that you, the reader, feel the weight of the grammar that Paul uses to talk about the constitutional *givenness* of the APEST ministries to the church. The verb form used for “given” (Gk. *edothē*, the aorist indicative form of *didomi*) is an aorist indicative, a very resolute verb form perfectly suited for use in constitutions. This is

because aorists reflect actions that took place in the past and as such they are once-and-for-all-time events. The effects of the past event are still felt in the present. They are historic in a similar way that the signing of the Declaration of Independence was historic—it will impact America’s self-understanding for all time.

The indicative *mood* intensifies the aorist *tense*, transforming it from a significant event into a statement of identity. Aorist indicatives are, in a real sense, *defining words*. They have the ring of constitutionality about them. They are used throughout the New Testament to create a theological basis from which disciples can live authentically in the world, describing the ongoing meaning and significance of the death of Christ on our behalf (e.g., Romans 6:10). In other words, the aorist indicative tense points us to that aspect of an event that possesses authentic and permanent meaning for faith. It presents us with something of a turning point, an anchor in some past event that is still connected to the present. Just so, the aorist indicatives used in Ephesians 4:1,7,11 demonstrate that APEST has, once and for all, been bequeathed to the Body of Christ. It happened; it cannot and will not be revoked. It always means something important. You must integrate it. Must let it define you. *Feel* the strength of it as the Word of God, my Padawan.

And now, factor in that all five APEST functions come as an inseparable unit. In Ephesians 4:7–11, all five APEST ministries come together under the sway of the ruling verb, *edothē* (verses 7, 11). The result is that the one verb attaches to all the APEST functions ... Christ *gave* the apostles, he *gave* the prophets, he *gave* the evangelists, he *gave* the shepherds, he *gave* the teachers. APEST comes as a unit or not at all. We cannot arbitrarily select two and edit the other three out without doing extreme violence to the grammar, as well as the intrinsic logic, of the entire text. Neither the grammar nor the theology allows us to qualify the text to suit our less dynamic, more institutional, preferences.⁴ Use of this verb form is the strongest way Paul can say that the fivefold functions/callings are always an intrinsic part of the Body of Christ.

So Jesus constitutionally embeds 5Q into the church via the giving of APEST to his people in every place and time. Based on the text, we can say that APEST is an intrinsic part of the genetic codes of the church in the same kind of way that Jesus himself is. In fact, I will show that APEST is actually an index of Jesus’ activity in a church. While aspects might be (and have been) suppressed, the functions themselves (or the possibility of them) are always already given, once and for all, in the ascension commissioning of the church. They are present insofar that Jesus is present! 5Q is at hand: the dormant intelligence and capacity built into the system, and because of this it can always be recovered and reactivated.

And if APEST is part of our foundational theological DNA, as I clearly think it is, then we as faithful leaders are *obliged* to factor it into our thinking, our practices, and the very leadership of the churches we are blessed to lead.

APEST is not only an integrated system; it is derived from the definitive expression of the ministry of Christ himself. It is Jesus' ministry in and through the local *ecclesia*. In fact, one of the major purposes of this book will be to highlight the fact that the Body of Christ exists to extend the logic and impact of the ministry of Christ in the world. As I will show in chapter six, the fivefold ministry is the way, or mode, by which Jesus is actually present in the church, and by which he extends his own ministry through us. The significance of this ought to be very clear to anyone who loves Jesus and wants to serve his cause and the church. We are talking kingdom impact here.

3. Attaining Maturity and Fullness in Christ (Ephesians 4:12–16)

Because each function/calling contributes something to the Body that the others do not, they mutually enrich each other. They are not to be sundered apart, as we have tended to do in church history. In other words, the church *always* needs to experience itself as *sent* (A), the prime agent to God's ongoing mission in the world. The church should always attend to God and his concerns (P), should always share the story and invite people into living relationship (E), should always maintain and develop healthy community (S), should always be rich in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (T). All are needed in every time and in every place. (This is why I will make the case, toward the end of this book, that they are indeed the marks of a true church.)

In Ephesians 4:12 we discern a shift in Paul's argument from the *prescription* of APEST to the *description* of the expected impact in the church. This section explicitly answers the question, "Why, in his ascension, did Christ bestow the fivefold on the church?"

The ascension gifts are given so that:

- the Body of Christ might be equipped, perfected, or completed (Gk *katartitzo* in v.12)
- the Body of Christ might grow into maturity (vv.13,15)⁵
- we might "attain to the fullness of Christ" (v.13)⁶
- we may in an embodied way live out the unity described in vv.1–6 (v.13)
- we might not be given to theological faddishness or deception (v.14)
- we might grow up into Christ our Head (v.15)
- we will be rightly ordered in our relationship to our Head and therefore to each other as his Body (vv.15–16)

All this so that we might be the empowered and called agents of the Kingdom that Jesus has always intended us to be.⁷

Look again at the list above and at the strength of the grammar. What we are looking at here is the initiating design of the church. The fivefold is part of the church's very constitution, and being divinely originated, can never be made defunct or transcended.

This is no small matter! This is a pretty potent rationale for taking the fivefold very, very, seriously indeed! What Paul is telling us in no uncertain terms is that there is a direct correlation between the extent to which we embrace, and operate, in all five APEST functions, and the extent to which we see the fruit and realization of these purposes. If we mess with the coherence of the APEST functions, then these objectives cannot be attained! We become incoherent ... dysfunctional. We cannot be the Body of Christ as Jesus intended without the fivefold active and present throughout the life of his movement. Said in yet another way, the church's capacity to "attain to the fullness of Christ" is at stake. This alone should make you sit up and pay attention.

This can be represented as follows:⁸

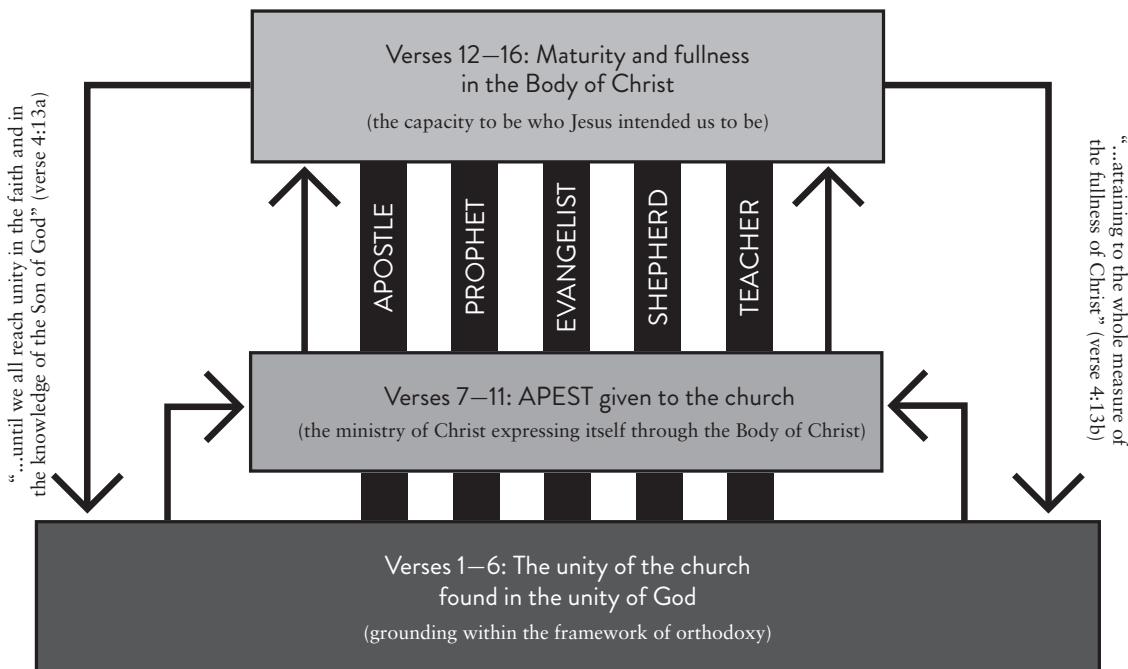


Figure 1.1 Attaining to the Fullness of Christ

This diagram allows us to see the systemic nature of APEST (just note the arrows). A system can be defined as a dynamic of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole. This is why it is a “body.” When everything works as it should, we will function according to our true nature.⁹ And as in all living bodies, each vital part is inextricably linked to the other. You need your cardiovascular system—try living without it. The same is true for your nervous, digestive, endocrine, muscular-skeletal, systems. You can't function if essential aspects of the system are missing, or if the system itself is sick or dysfunctional.

The sense of system functionality is woven throughout the Ephesians 4 text. Without the fivefold fully active and present in the life of the church, we not only diminish our understanding of the faith, but we introduce significant dysfunction into the system. My friend Brad Sargent rightly notes that all the elements in sick (dysfunctional) systems are just as interconnected as those in healthy ones. If one part goes down, the whole system is degraded.

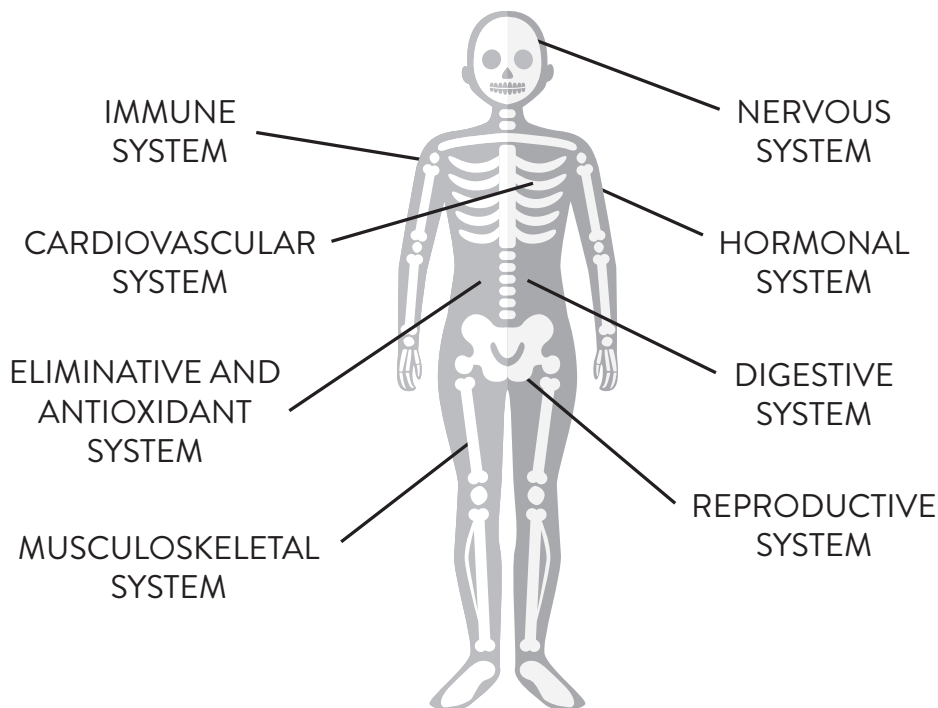


Figure 1.2 The Systems of the Human Body

Because they operate within a system, each individual APEST function enriches, counterbalances, and “corrects” the particular bias of each of the others. In fact, each function actually needs the other to be itself. For instance, your body’s cardiovascular system needs the nervous system to even exist. The same is true for the Body of Christ. There is spiritual ambience and dynamic balance when all five APEST systems are operating at peak—this is what Paul called no less than the fullness of Christ. This system synergy and balance results in a more mature expression of church, more grounded in its core truths.¹⁰ If all the parts are present and functional *in the way they were designed to function*, then the system is perfectly primed to do exactly what it was designed to do.

So it stands to reason that if we tamper with the systemic logic of the text and the symmetrical integrity of the fivefold system, we should not expect to produce the outcomes it foresees. This book comes along with an associated test instrument that will indicate dysfunction based on asymmetry in

the APEST functions. I will explain it thoroughly in section two, but for now just note that if a church lacks a missional vision or capacities, it's probably because the apostolic (A) function has been degraded or entirely delegitimized; if there is a thoughtlessness and lack of wisdom in the church it is probably because the teaching (T) function is not operating as it should; a lack of concern for prayer, holiness, and justice is very likely due to a dysfunctional prophetic (P) function, and so on.

If the above strengths-deficiencies description actually were true of a particular church, then we might visually represent that church as follows:

A P E S T

If dominated by the ES functions, the symmetry and natural balance of the system is upset and the church will experience imbalance in some form or another—whether due to over-development of one or two functions (what is called “precocious development”) or by overt lack of capacity due to significantly underdeveloped or “disabled” functions. Consider again your own body and consider the consequences in terms of your health. Try as it might, the asymmetrical (precocious and/or disabled) church above cannot do what Jesus did or what Jesus intends to do in and through it. How could it? It has limited its capacities to only two of Jesus’ ministry-essential APEST functions—it is quite literally *incapacitated*. It is only by activating the others missing from the equation that fullness and maturity of purpose can be attained.

Think of your own body again. If 60 percent of your vital systems went down, you wouldn’t live long. And if you managed to live, it would be by means of artificial life support and most certainly you would be severely handicapped.

In the light of this, think about how many of the problems you currently experience in your church/organization can be traced directly to an asymmetry or dysfunction in the APEST system. The 5Q Systems Tests will measure a church’s functional asymmetry as I have done briefly above. *More later.*

In relation to the dynamic interconnected and mutuality of the Body, my colleague Tim Catchim says that in order for the APEST giftings to fulfill their Christ-given purpose, we are not only required to *express* our own gifting, we are also required to find a way to *equip* others to do what we have been gifted to do. For example, apostles are to equip the Body to function

apostolically; prophets are to equip the Body to function prophetically, and so on down the line.

There is therefore a two-dimensional response required here—that God’s people express a calling as well as equip others. Responding to the grace that is given to each one of us in APEST moves us beyond mere self-expression into a dynamic, reciprocal process of training where each one of us becomes both a giver and a receiver, a leader and a follower.¹¹

In his comment on Ephesians 4:7–16, Eugene Peterson makes explicit the two-way relationship between the ministry of Christ with that of the Body of Christ: “Each [APEST] gift is an invitation and provides the means to participate in the work of Jesus.”¹² APEST is not just the gift-set that Jesus gives to his people. It is also the way his people get to participate in what he himself is doing ... what he wants to do through us. Ministry is always a two-way street.

In fact, I think that the perfect metaphor is that of a dance between two partners: In a waltz or the tango, the two dancers correspond perfectly to each other’s movements. There must be familiarity and trust between the partners—a knowledge of the other’s will, style, body and movements. When done well, it is more art than science. So too, Jesus leads us in a dance that can change the world. We must learn the steps to achieve increasing conformity to Jesus, his way, and his cause. With all five APEST functions operating, the church attains to, or at least has the possibility of attaining to, the fullness of Christ. We are built up, we grow, we mature, and we move ever closer toward the fullness of Christ as we appropriate APEST into our ministries as well as into the organizations we lead.