ARE THE OFFICES OF APOSTLE AND PROPHET STILL ACTIVE TODAY?

I. Cessationist View: Arguments That the Offices Are Not Active Today

A. Apostles were uniquely foundational and eyewitness-based

- Ephesians 2:19-20 describes the church as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Foundations are laid once; subsequent building does not repeat the foundation-laying role.

- Acts 1:21-22 sets strict qualifications for replacing Judas: one must have accompanied Jesus from John's baptism to His ascension and been a witness of the resurrection. Paul later appeals to having seen the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8 – "last of all, as to one untimely born").

- The Twelve + Paul function as authoritative eyewitnesses delivering inspired teaching and Scripture (e.g., their writings form much of the New Testament). No one after them meets these criteria.

B. Prophets were linked to foundational revelation that is now complete

- Hebrews 1:1-2: God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;" The finality of revelation in Christ suggests the need for new prophetic oracles has ended.

- Revelation 22:18-19 warns against adding to or taking away from "the words of the prophecy of this book," seen by many as closing the canon.

- Old and New Testament prophets often gave new, authoritative revelation. With the completed New Testament, this function is fulfilled (2 Timothy 3:16-17 – Scripture equips the man of God thoroughly).

C. Temporary equipping until maturity

- Ephesians 4:11-13 says these gifts (including apostles and prophets) are for building up the body "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Many interpret the apostolic/prophetic era as the time of initial foundation-

laying; the church has since reached a point where pastor-teachers and evangelists suffice.

- Miraculous signs and direct revelation cluster around key transitional periods (Moses, prophets, Christ and apostles) and appear to taper (compare the book of Acts to the later epistles).

D. Warnings against false apostles/prophets

- 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 and Revelation 2:2 show early concern about false claimants. The absence of universally recognized new apostles with apostolic signs (2 Corinthians 12:12) after the first generation supports the view that the office closed.

II. Continuationist View: Arguments That the Offices Are Still Active Today

A. Ephesians 4 implies ongoing gifts until the church is perfected

- Ephesians 4:11-13 lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers together without distinguishing temporary vs. permanent. The "until" clause points to the eschatological maturity of the whole church at Christ's return, not an earlier cutoff. If evangelists and pastors continue, so should the others.

- The church is still growing toward "unity of the faith" and "mature manhood"; full perfection has not arrived.

B. The Holy Spirit's ongoing work and New Testament patterns

- Joel 2:28-32 (quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17-18) promises prophecy, dreams, and visions poured out on "all flesh" in the last days. Pentecost begins this, but "last days" language in the New Testament covers the entire church age until Christ returns (Hebrews 1:2; Acts 2:17).

- 1 Corinthians 12:28-29 and 14:1-5, 29-32 treat prophecy as a normal, desirable gift for the assembled church, to be tested and used regularly. Paul does not limit it to the apostolic era.

- Examples of post-Pentecost prophets: Agabus (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), and Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8-9). These operated alongside, but distinct from, the apostles.

C. Broader apostolic language

- "Apostle" (apostolos = sent one) is sometimes used more broadly than the Twelve + Paul (e.g., Barnabas in Acts 14:14; possibly Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7; "messengers/apostles" of churches in 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25). This suggests an ongoing "sent one" function or missionary/apostolic ministry, even if the capital-A authoritative office of the foundational apostles is closed.

- Jesus' promise of the Spirit's ongoing guidance (John 14:26; 16:13) and the command to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1, 39), support continued operation.

D. No explicit termination verse

- The New Testament never states that these offices or gifts would cease before Christ's return. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 ties the cessation of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge to the coming of "that which is perfect" (widely understood as Christ's return or the eternal state), not the completion of the canon.

III. Summary of Key Tension Points

- Foundation vs. ongoing edification: Ephesians 2 (foundation) vs. Ephesians 4 (ongoing gifts).

- Eyewitness qualification for apostles vs. broader "sent one" usage.

- Completed revelation (Hebrews 1, canon) vs. ongoing edification and Spirit-led prophecy that must be tested (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 1 John 4:1).

- Historical pattern of clustering miracles around revelation-giving eras vs. promises that appear open-ended.

Responsible interpreters on both sides affirm the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), the need to test all claims (1 John 4:1; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20-22), and that any modern claim must align with the completed biblical revelation without adding to it authoritatively.

The debate largely turns on how one weighs the foundational uniqueness of the first generation against the ongoing empowerment of the Spirit in the "last days." Different Christian traditions (e.g., Cessationist Reformed/Baptist vs. Continuationist Pentecostal & Charismatic) reach different conclusions while appealing to the same texts.