

The Work Of An Evangelist

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Introduction:

- I. Leadership is an essential in the life of God's people.
 - A. Early church understood this - Acts 14:23; 15:22-35; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17
 - B. Part of that leadership comes from "the evangelist" as Paul directs Timothy to exert his influence and teach the brethren he worked with.
- II. But what exactly is an evangelist and what does he do? How do the Pastoral Epistles help us better understand how to be an evangelist today?

Body:

- I. **WHAT DOES THE WORD "EVANGELIST" MEAN?**
 - A. The term only appears three times in the NT:
 1. Acts 21:8
 2. Ephesians 4:11
 3. 2 Timothy 4:5
 4. "So, we are told that Philip was an evangelist, evangelists have been given to the church, and Timothy was to do the work of an evangelist. But nowhere do we find a clear description of the evangelist's proper ministry or the qualifications for this 'office'"¹
 - B. What does the original term "evangelist" mean?
 1. We are not helped much by looking outside the New Testament: "The only non-Christian usage of the word is a poorly preserved inscription from Rhodes, where it apparently means 'proclaimer of oracular messages.' However, this is disputed by Spicq, who argues that there are so many questions about the inscription that 'nothing certain can be drawn from it.' Marshall doubts the inscription predates Christian usage. In any case, it is hardly likely that this distant inscription would have had any influence on the early Christian use of the term."²
 2. Word studies of the Greek term are mostly inconclusive:
 - a. **53.76 εὐαγγελιστής, οὗ** *m*: one who announces the gospel— 'evangelist.' . . . 'we went to the home of the evangelist Philip . . . and stayed with him' Ac 21:8. Though the term εὐαγγελιστής indicates only an individual who 'announces the gospel,' early usage would suggest that this was often a person who went from place to place announcing the good news.³
 - b. BAGD: **εὐαγγελιστής, οὗ, ὁ** (acc. to A Dieterich ZNW 1, '00, 336-8, title of pagan priests: IG XII 1, 675.—Dialekt-Inschr. 5702, 22; 37 [Ionic] εὐαγγελίς is the official title of the priestess of Hera) *preacher of the gospel, evangelist* Eph 4:11 (DYHadidian, CBQ 28, '66, 317-21: gospel writer). Acc. to Ac 21:8 a designation of Philip, one of the seven. 2 Ti 4:5 Timothy is so called.—Harnack, Mission u. Ausbreitung⁴ '24, 334, 6 al. (s. 983 index). M-M.⁴

- c. **EVANGELIST.** The word translated in the NT ‘evangelist’ is a noun from the verb euangelizomai ‘to announce news’, and usually rendered in English versions as ‘preach the gospel.’ (The NT term echoes Heb. *me asser, mebassere* in Is. 40:9; 52:7.) The verb is very common in the NT, and is applied to God (Gal. 3:8), to our Lord (Lk. 20:1), and to ordinary church members (Acts 8:4), as well as to apostles on their missionary journeys. The noun ‘evangelist’ occurs three times only in the NT. Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5) is exhorted by Paul to do the work of an evangelist; that is to say, make known the facts of the gospel. Timothy had accompanied the apostle on his missionary journeys. But it is plain from the injunctions in the two letters addressed to him that his work when the apostle wrote was very largely local and pastoral. That he is enjoined to do the work of an evangelist shows that a man who was an evangelist could also be a pastor and teacher. In Acts 21:8 Philip is described as ‘the evangelist’. Philip had been chosen as one of the Seven in Acts 6, and after the persecution of Stephen he was prominent in preaching the gospel in unevangelized parts (e.g. Acts 8:5, 12, 35, 40). Though an evangelist, he was not included among the apostles (Acts 8:14). A similar distinction is made between Timothy and the apostles in 2 Cor. 1:1 and Col. 1:1. It will be seen, then, that though apostles were evangelists, not all evangelists were apostles. This distinction is confirmed in Eph. 4:11, where the office of ‘evangelist’ is mentioned after ‘apostle’ and ‘prophet’, and before ‘pastor’ and ‘teacher’. From this passage it is plain that the gift of evangelist was a distinct gift within the Christian church; and although all Christians doubtless performed this sacred task, as opportunity was given to them, there were some who were pre-eminently called and endowed by the Holy Spirit for this work. Later in the history of the church the term ‘evangelist’ was used for a writer of one of the four Gospels.”⁵

C. Summary:

1. The term is simply a direct translation of the term “evangelize” which means to “bring good news.”
2. So an “evangelist could be viewed as simply a term for one who proclaims the good news about Jesus Christ.”⁶

D. Does this mean an evangelist only preaches to the lost?

1. All fifteen examples of the verb form of evangelist in Acts do reference the initial proclamation of the good news to unbelievers.
2. But evangelists can preach and teach to Christians:
 - a. Evangelists can speak to a church (2 Tim 4:2).
 - b. Paul wants to go and preach in Rome where there is a church (Rom 1:15).

II. **EXAMINATION OF THE TEXTS WHERE THE TERM IS USED**

- A. Acts 21:8: “*On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him*”
1. Why is Philip designated as “the evangelist”?
 2. Some think it is to keep people from thinking of him as the apostle of the same name.⁷ But Luke adds “one of the seven” making who he is very clear (cf. Acts 6:3, 5).
 3. It seems designed to connect him to his work in Acts 8 which three times is described as evangelism (8:12, 35, 40).

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4. This does fit with the idea that an evangelist preaches to non-Christians.
 5. But then why is Philip “permanently” located at Caesarea?
- B. Ephesians 4:11: “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers*”
1. Paul lists five kinds of “offices” or people who help the church maintain its unity.
 - a. Note some have tried to argue there are only four groups here, with “pastors and teachers” being the same group.
 - b. “Pastors and teachers” is *not* a Granville Sharp construction⁸ and so these are separate groups.
 - c. There is some evidence that teachers are a subset of shepherds (all shepherds must teach, but not all teachers are pastors).
 2. There is no suggestion in Scripture that there is a supernatural gifting for evangelism. Prophecy and prophets are mentioned (1 Cor 12:10) and teaching (Rom 12:7) but nothing is ever said of evangelism.
 3. Further questions remain as to whether this is even an office. Some strongly argue for it, while most scholars oppose such a view.⁹ The emphasis in Ephesians 4:11 seems to be on the function, the work, and not some sort of office.
 4. As the order of listing here seems to place emphasis on the apostles and prophets as foundational (Eph 2:20) so once again it seems that evangelists meet that role of church planters who build on that foundation.
 5. Barclay says evangelists “were the rank and file missionaries of the Church who took the good news to a world which had never heard it.”¹⁰
 6. But what then do we make of verse 12, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ?”
 7. This is used by some to argue that the evangelist is more than a church planter but can and must continue as a local church minister, “equipping” and “building” them up.
 8. Most denominational material begins to depart here to talk about the preacher as pastor and how these roles overlap and so quickly becomes useless.
 9. Other distinctions are easily seen as artificial:
 - a. “Van Gelderen says the pastor leads the sheep while the evangelist ‘shears the sheep’ or ‘goes for the jugular.’ Rice agrees announcing that “evangelists have a special ministry to the church in preaching against sin.”¹¹
 - b. Flanders announces that every movement needs ‘big voices’ that articulate its views and the “Christian movement finds its big voices in the evangelist.”¹²
- C. 2 Timothy 4:5: “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, *do the work of an evangelist*, fulfill your ministry.”
1. Does it mean that Timothy *was* an evangelist? Or does it mean that he should get busy and do the kind of work that evangelists normally do even if he was not usually in that role?
 2. “As Liefeld suggests; ‘Do the work of an evangelist’ is a straightforward command, implying that Timothy might be so consumed with other needs and tasks that he is in
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danger of not pursuing the work he probably originally did with Paul on their travels together.”¹³

3. Elsewhere Paul says that Timothy served him in the gospel (Phil 2:22) and that Timothy is a servant of God in the gospel (1 Thess 3:2), both verses using cognates of the word ‘evangelist.’”¹⁴

III. WHAT THEN IS AN EVANGELIST?

A. There is very little consensus on this issue.

B. Historical use of the term “evangelist”

1. “After the New Testament a complete black-out hangs over the ‘evangelist,’ until the writings of Tertullian, and his references to the word are not helpful in telling the place of the evangelist in the second century. Eusebius mentions evangelists a number of times as carrying on the activities associated with this class of men in the New Testament, but he is sufficiently vague to indicate that his was not first hand knowledge. Many of those called teachers also sound like evangelists, so that it is possible that there was a progressive convergence of these terms in the second century.”¹⁵
2. Some even taught that there is no such office today:
 - a. John Calvin believed it was done away with like apostles, and prophets.¹⁶
 - b. Over time the term came to be applied to the writers of the four Gospels.
 - c. The term was hardly used much after the time of the apostles up until the nineteenth century and fell out of use.
 - d. That means that many that would usually be thought of as evangelists, like John Wesley or George Whitfield, did not describe themselves as evangelists.
3. But the office of “evangelist” was revived in the nineteenth century, due largely to the work of Charles Finney and revivalism.¹⁷

C. More modern usage of the term:

1. It is a specific gift for **preaching only to the lost** - “In other words, the early church had ministers who had specific evangelistic gifts. They could preach evangelistic sermons, make the good news relevant to unbelievers, or help them to make a commitment to Christ.”¹⁸
2. Most commonly it is said to be **one who travels**, usually to places where there is no church.
 - a. “A traveling minister, whose work was not confined to a particular church.”¹⁹
 - b. “Although it is not possible to be overly dogmatic about the role of the NT evangelist in light of the limited biblical data, the evidence seems to strongly suggest that he functioned not as an itinerant revivalist preacher but as a missionary church planter.”²⁰
3. Some want the evangelist to be a **personal worker**, perhaps as a carryover from the thinking that the evangelist deals strictly with non-Christians.
 - a. So an evangelist in a fixed location still is concerned with the lost: “The pastor should lead in soul-winning activity. He should be the leading soul-winner in his church.”²¹

- b. In plain opposition to such thinking is the reality that “the evangelist’s work of preaching the gospel included strengthening the faith of those already converted, refuting false doctrine, instructing the church, and organizing congregations.”²²
- 4. Others see the evangelist much more like our use of the term “**preacher**”:
 - a. “In the post-apostolic period it is the evangelists who continue to carry out many of the activities of the apostles and it is the pastors who now exercise the leadership role, alongside the teachers, previously held by the prophets”²³
 - b. This view is quite common among brethren.
 - 1) Ferrell Jenkins uses evangelist, preacher and minister or servant interchangeably, noting “in popular thinking an evangelist is one who travels from place to place in his preaching, but the idea of travel is not inherent in the word *evangelist*.”²⁴ Jenkins puts the emphasis on how “the terms used of various workers in the New Testament describe the work to be performed.”²⁵
 - 2) Everett Ferguson agrees “Filling an office indicated, not the possession of authority, but rather, designation to perform a work; an office was a function, a responsibility.”²⁶
 - 3) Homer Hailey also sees “evangelist” as synonymous as minister and preacher.²⁷

D. Summary:

1. Paul’s example is helpful. “Luke’s portrayal of Paul’s pastoral preaching reflects his conviction that evangelistic work is not completed with the conversion of a few individuals and the formation of a church . . . One can scarcely demarcate Paul’s evangelistic and pastoral work among the Ephesians. The recollection that he had taught ‘in public and from house to house’ includes both his evangelistic work and his work within the house church ... Luke knows no sharp distinction between evangelistic and pastoral preaching.”²⁸
2. “By definition, the ‘evangelists’ are those who proclaim the ‘good news’ of the gospel. Such a preacher did not have the authority of an apostle, nor the inspiration of a prophet. Hendriksen styles them as ‘traveling missionaries.’ One must be careful, however, to make a definition broad enough to include Philip (Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim 4:5). Both of these leaders appear to be working with an established church, doing considerable ‘pastoral’ service (esp. in the case of Timothy).”²⁹

IV. THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST AS VIEWED THROUGH TIMOTHY AND TITUS

- A. While there is much discussion and controversy about the etymology of “evangelist” there is no controversy about Paul’s expectation of Timothy and Titus.
- B. Almost every verse in the Pastorals can be fit into one of two categories:
 1. Influence
 2. Teach the Word
- C. Teaching is the central theme of the Pastorals:
 1. Teaching directly commanded in 1 Timothy:
 - a. 1:3: charge not to teach a different doctrine
 - b. 4:6: put these things before the brothers (i.e. teach them)

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- c. 4:11: command and teach these things
 - d. 4:13: read the Scriptures aloud publicly
 - e. 4:16: keep a close watch on self and your teaching
 - f. 5:7: command these things
 - g. 6:2b: teach these things
2. Teaching directly commanded in 2 Timothy
 - a. 2:2: teach
 - b. 2:14: remind and charge
 - c. 2:25: correct with gentleness
 - d. 4:2: preach
 3. Teaching directly commanded in Titus
 - a. 2:1: teach sound doctrine
 - b. 2:15: declare these things, exhort and rebuke
 - c. 3:1: remind
 - d. 3:8: insist
 - e. 3:14: teach
- D. Nearly every other section of the Pastorals deals with *what* to teach and/or *who* to teach it to
1. 1 Tim 2:1: teach on prayer
 2. 1 Tim 2:8: teach men about prayer
 3. 1 Tim 2:9: teach women about modesty and their role
 4. 1 Tim 3:1ff: teach on elder/deacon qualifications
 5. 1 Tim 5:1ff: teach various age groups about their roles
 6. 1 Tim 5:20: rebuke sinners
 7. 1 Tim 6:1-2: teach slaves and masters
 8. 2 Tim 2:14: remind the brethren not to quarrel about words
 9. Titus 1:5: teach on elder qualifications
 10. Titus 1:11: silence false teachers
 11. Titus 1:13: rebuke Cretans
 12. Titus 2:1-10: teach various age groups their roles
 13. Titus 3:1: remind brethren of a variety of responsibilities
- E. The other dominate concern in Timothy and Titus is influence
1. 1 Timothy 4:7: avoid myths
 2. 1 Tim 4:7b: train yourself for godliness
 3. 1 Tim 4:12: be an example in speech and conduct
 4. 1 Tim 5:21: don't show partiality
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5. 1 Tim 6:11: flee evil and pursue righteousness
 6. 1 Tim 6:20: avoid irreverent babble
 7. 2 Tim 1:8: don't be ashamed
 8. 2 Tim 2:3: share in suffering
 9. 2 Tim 2:15: present yourself as a worker
 10. 2 Tim 2:16: avoid babble
 11. 2 Tim 2:22: flee youthful lusts
 12. 2 Tim 2:23 - avoid quarrels
 13. 2 Tim 4:5: be sober minded and endure suffering
 14. Titus 2:7: model good works and teach with integrity
 15. Titus 3:9ff: avoid foolish controversies
- F. With few exceptions, about the only commands that can be found in the Pastorals that don't fit this construct are personal notes:
1. 2 Tim 4:9, 21: come and see me
 2. 2 Tim 4:13: bring my cloak and the parchments
 3. 2 Tim 4:20: greet various brothers
 4. Titus 3:12: come see me
 5. Titus 3:13: send Zenas and Apollos along the way
- G. What then is the work of an evangelist?
1. **Build influence (live the Word) and teach the Word!**
 2. "Their task was pre-eminently one of teaching and preaching-reproving, rebuking, and exhorting."³⁰
 3. Jenkins notes the evangelist is to "preach the word (2 Tim 4:1-5). He must put the brethren in mind of truth (1 Tim 4:6). Timothy and Titus repeatedly are urged to teach or remind the brethren of certain responsibilities."³¹
 4. Jenkins also draws the contrast in elders who are told to "take heed to self... and to the flock" (Acts 20:28) and the evangelist who is to "take heed to self and to your teaching . . . The primary work of the leader is related to caring for the flock (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:17). The primary work of the evangelist is to pay close attention to the teaching."³²
 5. James Needham follows suit, generally tracing out Paul's admonitions in Timothy and Titus such as "put them in remembrance (1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 2:14; Titus 3:1)."³³
 6. Dee Bowman follows much the same pattern.³⁴

V. MAKING THIS PRACTICAL - INFLUENCE AND TEACHING FOR TODAY

- A. What is the work of an evangelist?
1. To live in a way that enables him to teach God's Word so the kingdom grows stronger.
 2. In short, live the Word so you can teach the Word.

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- B. *What does influence include?*
1. Moral purity: 1 Tim 4:12, 16; 5:21-22; 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:15, 22; 4:5; Titus 2:7 -- you have to live it first
 2. Treating people right: 1 Tim 5:17, 19; 5:21; 2 Tim 2:3, 25; Titus 3:1
 3. Preparing yourself personally so you have something to say and can say it well 1 Tim 4:6 (study is necessary!)
 4. Avoiding foolish controversies that detract from our real work and make us look foolish 1 Tim 4:7; 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16, 23; Titus 3:9-10
- C. *Do you mean taking old sister Dorcas a spool of thread or making hospital calls or going to lunch with a non-Christian could be the work of a preacher?*
- D. *What about teaching?*
1. From Timothy and Titus we learn that it needs to be done gently (2 Tim 2:24-25) and boldly (2 Tim 1:6-8).
 2. Most importantly, both books just continually hold on to the Scriptures and sound doctrine (1 Tim 1:3; 4:13; 6:14; 2 Tim 1:13; 3:16-17; Titus 2:1).
 3. We must do the same!

Conclusion:

- I. Preaching today may be more difficult and complicated than it's ever been before.
 - A. One author identified five challenges preachers must deal with today.³⁵
 1. Dealing with the complexity of life in the 21st century
 2. Wide variety of expectations for a preacher
 3. Individual godliness
 4. Managing marriage and family
 5. Adapting leadership style
 - B. How do we answer all of that? How can we be true to God, true to our brethren and true to ourselves?
- II. The message of Timothy and Titus answers every question and every challenge: *be an evangelist!* Live the Word so you can teach the Word!

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Endnotes

- ¹William W. Combs, "The Biblical Role of the Evangelist," Detroit Baptist Seminary. Vol. 7: Fall 2002, *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, p. 24.
- ²Combs.
- ³ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.). New York: United Bible societies.
- ⁴Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature : A translation and adaption of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der ubrigen urchristlichen Literatur* (318). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ⁵Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.) (347-348). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.
- ⁶Combs.
- ⁷Combs cites C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), p. 993; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 339.
- ⁸Combs notes that the GS rule applies only to singular nouns, not plural ones. Page 31.
- ⁹Combs 35-36.
- ¹⁰William Barclay, *The letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. 2000, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (147). Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- ¹¹Van Gelderen, *Revival and Evangelism*, p. 8 and Rice in *The Evangelist*, pp. 29-32. Cited by Combs 42.
- ¹²Flanders "The Work of the Evangelist," p. 16 cited by Combs 42.
- ¹³Combs 44.
- ¹⁴Mounce, W. D. (2002). Vol. 46: *Word Biblical Commentary : Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary (576). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- ¹⁵Everett Ferguson, "The Ministry of the Word in the First Two Centuries," *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1957), pp. 21-31.
- ¹⁶Combs 45.
- ¹⁷Combs 47.
- ¹⁸Thorsten Prill, "Evangelism, Theology and the Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, World Evangelical Fellowship. Theological Commission. (2005). Vol. 29 (electronic ed.). Evangelical review of theology : Volume 29. Exeter, England: Paternoster Periodicals.
- ¹⁹Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word studies in the New Testament*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
- ²⁰Combs 48.
- ²¹L.L. Grubb, "Why the Pastorate is Foundational in Christian Service," *Grace Journal*, Vol 2 No. 1-Winter 1961, p. 37.
- ²²Ferguson.
- ²³Lincoln, A. T. (2002). Vol. 42: *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary (250). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- ²⁴Ferrell Jenkins, "Do the Work of an Evangelist," *Florida College Lectures 2009*, FC Press, Temple Terrace, FL, p. 67.

²⁵Jenkins 67.

²⁶Ferguson.

²⁷Homer Hailey, *The Preacher – His Spirit and Work, 2 Corinthians, 1, 2, Timothy, Titus*, Bible Class Notes series, Florida College bookstore, nd, pp. 2-3.

²⁸James W. Thompson, “Paul’s Preaching Ministry: Evangelistic and Pastoral Preaching in Acts,” *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2000).

²⁹Boles, K. L. (1993). *Galatians & Ephesians*. The College Press NIV Commentary. Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

³⁰Ferguson.

³¹Jenkins 69.

³²Jenkins 71.

³³James P. Needham, “God’s Concept of the Preacher’s Duties, *Preachers and Preaching*, Number 7.

³⁴Dee Bowman, *Common Sense Preaching*, Florida College Press: Tampa, 1999, pp. 46-47.

³⁵Leith Anderson, *Personal Challenges for 21st Century Pastors*, Bib Sac 151: 603 (July 94), page 260ff.