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THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF THE EVANGELIST

by
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Few would question the prominent role played by "evangelists" in the history of fundamentalism—men like Bob Jones, Sr., for example. Jones was apparently fond of saying: "It takes evangelistic unction to make orthodoxy function."[2] Likewise, it would be difficult to write one page in the history of new evangelicalism without bringing up the name of Billy Graham. The "office" of evangelist is commonly accepted in fundamental and evangelical circles as a legitimate calling based on the teaching of Scripture. John R. Rice reminds us: "The calling of an evangelist is a holy calling, and it is a sin against God to talk against evangelists…."[3] Rice adds that, in fact, evangelists are more important to the work of God than pastors and teachers.[4] But can Rice's viewpoint actually be sustained from God's Word?

When one turns to the pages of Scripture, it turns out that the amount of material dealing with the evangelist is rather sparse. The word *evangelist,* the Greek εὐαγγελιστής, is used only three times in the NT:

> On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him (Acts 21:8).[5]
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> And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11).

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[2]Quoted in George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), p. 193.

[3]*The Evangelist and His Work* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), p. 11.

[4]Ibid., p. 14. So also Rick Flanders, "The Work of the Evangelist," *Preach the Word,* July–September 2001, p. 16.

[5]Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible,* 1995 edition.

It may come as a surprise, but there is actually some debate about what exactly is included in the content of the "gospel" proclaimed by the evangelist. Ordinarily, "preaching the gospel" is understood to mean the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Christ in order to bring about the conversion of unbelievers. That this is the overwhelming usage of εὐαγγελίζω is easily confirmed by a simple concordance search. For example, all fifteen examples of the verb in Acts refer to initial proclamation of the good news to unbelievers. However, some hold that the scriptural idea of preaching the gospel "covers a range of activities from primary evangelism and planting of churches to the ongoing building of Christians and the establishment of settled congregations."[15] Probably the main reason for supposing that εὐαγγελίζω denotes more than the initial presentation of the message of Christ is Paul's use of the verb in Romans 1:15: "So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." The idea that εὐαγγελίζω primarily involves the initial conversion of the unsaved would not seem to fit Paul's anticipated ministry in an already established church.

One possible way around the problem is to take the "you" ("you…who are in Rome") in a wider sense to include Romans generally (unbelievers), not just the church.[16] Thus Paul is interested in coming to Rome and winning more converts. But this solution might seem to violate the preaching policy the apostle sets forth later in Romans 15:20–21: "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND." In other words, if Paul is saying in 1:15 that he wishes to come to Rome to evangelize new converts, that would seem to conflict with his policy of confining his preaching and church planting to virgin territory. But this apparent conflict might be answered by the

[15]O'Brien, *Ephesians,* p. 299. See also idem, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), pp. 62–63; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians,* International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), p. 390; idem, *Essays on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), pp. 163–65; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 53; James L. Boyer, *For a World Like Ours: Studies in I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), p. 42, n. 10; Paul Bowers, "Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (June 1987): 197–98.

[16]E.g., Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (reprint of 1883 ed.; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), p. 90. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans,* Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 65.

verses that follow (15:22–24): "For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while." If "for this reason" (διό) in verse 22 looks back to verses 20–21, then Paul could be saying that his normal policy of preaching in virgin territory had prevented him from coming to Rome earlier, but now that he had fully evangelized the eastern empire ("but now, with no further place for me in these regions"), that policy no longer constrained him.[17] However, many commentators do not connect the "for this reason" of verse 22 with verses 20–21 specifically, but with verses 17–19 (especially 19b)—the idea being that Paul had been hindered in coming to Rome because he "was concentrating on 'fulfilling the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum.' It was the needs of ministry in these regions that 'hindered' Paul 'many times' from coming to Rome,"[18] not his policy of only preaching in virgin territory. But these reasons should probably not be separated. As Stott explains: "On the one hand, because he was concentrating on pioneer evangelism elsewhere, he was not free to come to them. On the other hand, because the Roman church had not been founded by him, he did not feel at liberty to come and stay. Soon, however, as he is about to explain, he will visit them, since he will only be 'passing through' (24) on his way to the unevangelized field of Spain."[19]

Therefore, Paul's stated policy of pioneer evangelism in virgin territories should not be used to rule out the possibility that Paul's primary reference in Romans 1:15 is to initial evangelization of the unsaved. That policy may have not been an absolute rule anyway. Since Paul wants to use Rome as a base for his operations in the western part of the empire, where he will be preaching in virgin territory, he must now come to Rome and secure the church's support for his new missionary endeavors. While he is there, it is not unreasonable

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[17]Robert Haldane, *Commentary on Romans* (reprint of 1853 ed.; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988), p. 631; Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (reprint of 1886 ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 441; E. H. Gifford, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (reprint of 1886 ed.; Minneapolis: James Family, 1977), p. 228; Ernest Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans,* trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 397.

[18]Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 899.

[19]John Stott, *Romans,* Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 383.

that in the largest city of the empire he may do some evangelization of the unsaved and thus "obtain some fruit among" the Romans "even as among the rest of the Gentiles" (1:13). So, while the case for restricting εὐαγγελίζω in 1:15 to the initial conversion of unbelievers is not proven, even Moo—who does not lean toward such a restriction—admits, Paul's normal use of the verb *is* restricted to initial evangelistic preaching.[20]

If we thus conclude that εὐαγγελιστής is derived from εὐαγγελίζω, which seems most likely, then the chief ministry of the NT evangelist involved the evangelization of unbelievers. Though this emphasis was primary, no doubt the message of the evangelist would have included some teaching and discipleship of new believers to form them into a functioning NT church, if, as I will argue, the NT evangelist was primarily a church planter. Besides, any ministry of itinerant evangelism that does not lead to new converts being formed into local churches is foreign to the NT. Thus, the evangelist would probably not have had his primary ministry in previously established churches. That ministry, as we will see, was primarily left to other gifted men—pastors, and teachers.

The discussion of the role of the evangelist thus far has been built on the derivation of εὐαγγελιστής from εὐαγγελίζω. This is not invalid since, as we have previously stated, nouns ending in της are basically the agents of the action denoted by their cognate verbs. Still, since the meaning of a word is ultimately determined by its usage, we must now turn to the three NT examples of the noun εὐαγγελιστής itself to more fully determine the role of the evangelist.

NEW TESTAMENT USES OF ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΣΤΗΣ

Acts 21:8

> On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.

The first occurrence of εὐαγγελιστής in the NT is found in Acts 21:8. Paul and his companions stopped at the house of Philip in Caesarea on the final leg of his third missionary journey. Philip is the only individual in the NT who is clearly identified as an evangelist. But why does Luke designate Philip as "the evangelist"? Some commentators suggest that the designation is used mainly to differentiate him from Philip the apostle.[21] But if that were its only purpose, the additional

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[20]*Romans,* p. 63, n. 62.

[21]E.g., C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles,* vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998),

phrase "one of the seven" would seem to be redundant.[22] More likely, the article "the" (τοῦ) is anaphoric (previous reference).[23] Thus it seems obvious that "the evangelist" is intended to remind us of Philip's earlier ministry in Acts 8, which is described three times by the use of εὐαγγελίζω (vv. 12, 35, 40).[24] For Luke, the title "evangelist" admirably describes the ministry of Philip in Acts 8. There his ministry was one of initial evangelization of unbelievers in Samaria, the Ethiopian eunuch, and those who lived in the maritime plain of Palestine, ending up in Caesarea. It was in Caesarea that Paul visited him approximately twenty years later (Acts 21). Whether Philip stayed put in Caesarea all those years or engaged in other itinerant activity is unknown. More importantly, the description of Philip's ministry in Acts 8 supports our previous suggestion that the main ministry of the εὐαγγελιστής is the initial evangelization of unbelievers.

Philip's ministry as an evangelist raises some questions, however. Philip displayed the ability to perform miraculous signs, as did the apostles (8:6). Is this ability a normal aspect of the evangelist's ministry? Edgar, who seeks to eliminate miraculous signs as a necessary part of the evangelist's ministry, argues: "The Bible gives us only one example of an evangelist performing miracles, in contrast to numerous examples of apostles doing so."[25] But the data can easily be construed to reach the opposite conclusion. One could argue that the only clearly identified example of the ministry of an evangelist in the NT is one that is characterized by miracles. Still, Edgar is probably correct in his conclusion. Evangelists were not apostles (at least not all of them), whose authority was necessarily attested by miracles (2 Cor 12:12), so it is unlikely that miracles were a necessary feature of the evangelist's gifting.

We know Philip baptized converts in Samaria as well as the

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p. 993; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 339.

[22]Garth L. Reese, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1976), p. 784.

[23]For a discussion of this use of the article, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 217–20.

[24]F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity: Part I: The Acts of the Apostles,* vol. 4 by Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 267; William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts,* IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 303; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p. 748.

[25]Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983), p. 321.

Ethiopian eunuch. While the baptizing in Samaria led to the inauguration of a local church (cf. Acts 9:31), this is not easily asserted in the case of the eunuch, with whom Philip seems to have had minimal contact. What happened to the eunuch is unclear.[26] The establishment of a church at Philip's ultimate destination of Caesarea seems likely—there seems to have been one there when Paul visited. So from what we can discern about Philip's ministry in Samaria and Caesarea, his evangelistic efforts led to the establishment of new churches.

Ephesians 4:11

> And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,

The second occurrence of εὐαγγελιστής in the NT is found in Ephesians 4:11. There Paul begins the chapter with an exhortation to maintain the unity of the Spirit (vv. 1–3). The basis for this unity is then set forth in a sevenfold confession of the unifying realities of the faith: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism,…" (vv. 4–6).[27] But Paul then reminds us, beginning in verse 7, that within this unity there is a note of necessary diversity that ultimately contributes to the proper functioning of the body: Christ has given grace to "each one of us" in the form of different spiritual gifts (v. 8). After a digression in verses 9–10 that vindicates Christ as the dispenser of gifts, Paul returns to the subject of gifts in v. 11, but he shifts from believers as the recipients of gifts to the nature of some of the gifts. More specifically, he lists five groups of gifted people "who are themselves gifts to the church,"[28] one of which is "evangelists."

We should begin by noting that Paul lists a total of five kinds of spiritually gifted people: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. A popular interpretation sees only four groups, with pastors and teachers being equated as one group or office—the pastor-teacher.[29] The argument for equating the two is most often

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[26]Irenaeus says the eunuch became a missionary among his own people (*Against Heresies* 3.12.10), but there is no record of an Ethiopian (Nubian) church earlier than the fourth century. See F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts,* 2nd ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 178.

[27]O'Brien, *Ephesians,* p. 273.

[28]Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 706.

[29]E.g., John MacArthur, Jr., *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 143; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians,* p. 348; Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon,* New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), p. 238; D. Martyn Loyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians*

syntactical—while "apostles" and "prophets" and "evangelists" are each modified by separate articles (τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς), "pastors" and "teachers" are joined in a grammatical unit with one article (τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους). Sometimes this is incorrectly identified as a Granville Sharp construction.[30] But the Granville Sharp rule applies only to singular nouns, not plural ones, as in Ephesians 4:11.[31] Wallace has now clearly demonstrated that the equating of "pastors and teachers" is an invalid conclusion that fails to understand the real significance of the syntactical structure.[32] Actually, the grammar strongly suggests that in the case of "pastors and teachers," the first group, pastors, is to be viewed as a subset of the second group, teachers. "Thus, Eph 4:11 seems to affirm that all pastors were to be teachers, though not all teachers were to be pastors."[33] We might, therefore, translate the last part of Ephesians 4:11, "some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and other teachers." Pastors and teachers are separate groups though the grammar of Ephesians 4:11 is designed to denote that pastors are always gifted as teachers, though not vice versa. Of course, teachers are also clearly listed as a distinct group in 1 Corinthians 12:28, 29 and a distinguishable gift in Romans 12:7. Thus pastor-teacher is still an appropriate title for those in the group Paul calls pastors, but there still remains a fifth group who are strictly teachers.

These five categories are groups of gifted people, not spiritual gifts per se. But it is unclear if this is an important distinction. Schreiner,

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4:1–16 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 193; Curtis Vaughan, *Ephesians,* Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 194; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), p. 197; Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 203.

[30]See, e.g., George W. Knight III, "Two Offices (Elders/Bishops and Deacons) and Two Orders of Elders (Preaching/Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders): A New Testament Study," *Presbyterion* 11 (Spring 1985): 10.

[31]See Wallace, *Grammar,* pp. 270–77.

[32]Wallace, *Grammar,* pp. 278–86, esp. p. 284; idem, "The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Καί-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (Spring 1983): 59–84.

[33]Wallace, *Grammar,* p. 284. See also O'Brien (*Ephesians,* p. 300), who accepts Wallace's analysis. Others come to the same conclusion, though without the precise syntactical argument. See John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians,* trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 179; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians,* Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), p. 250; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians,* Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), pp. 159–60.

for example, observes: "In 1 Corinthians 12 the text moves from the gift manifested (e.g., prophecy) to gifted person (prophets), suggesting that no dichotomy is envisioned between them."[34] Scripture itself speaks of prophets and prophecy (1 Cor 12:10), teachers and teaching (Rom 12:7); however, it does not single out a spiritual gift of pastoring or evangelism.

Therefore, the question remains whether we should assume a corresponding generalized spiritual gift for every one of the five gifted persons in Ephesians 4:11 and what that might mean. In the past the gifts of pastor and evangelist were seen as restricted to selected individuals whose ministry was viewed more as an office—pastor was always connected to the office of elder-overseer (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9). But in the latter part of the twentieth century there has come a greater emphasis on spiritual gifts to the whole body of Christ and thus their importance to the proper functioning of the church, so that pastoring and evangelism are sometimes now viewed as common gifts available to most believers.[35] For example, in the 1980s Dallas Seminary issued a report arguing that the gift of pastoring is a general gift available to all believers (including women) and is to be distinguished from the gift as it is exercised in the office of elder-pastor, which is restricted to men.[36] Following this line, Ryrie says: "The gift is the ability and can be exercised whether one holds an office in a local church or not. In this regard much confusion exists over the gift of pastor. The gift is the ability to shepherd people. This can be done by the person who occupies what we call, in our modern ecclesiology, the office of the pastorate. Or it can be done, say, by a dean of men or a dean of women in a school. Or it can be done by the wife and mother in a home."[37] However, this is clearly a minority view; most all who write on the subject restrict the gift of pastor to the office of elder-overseer.[38]

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[34]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 355–56.

[35]*Dictionary of Christianity in America,* s.v. "Evangelism and Evangelists," by V. W. Baker, p. 417; Cary G. Kimbrell, "An Investigation into the Changing Concepts of an Evangelist in Christian Thought and Practice" (Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992), p. 171.

[36]"Women in the Church: Biblical Data Report," Ad hoc Faculty Committee on the Admission of Women to Dallas Theological Seminary, n.d., pp. 4–5.

[37]Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), pp. 367–68. See also Leslie B. Flynn, *19 Gifts of the Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1974), pp. 66–73.

[38]Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians,* p. 348; Lincoln, *Ephesians,* p. 251; O'Brien, *Ephesians,* p. 300; Best, *Ephesians,* p. 392; Markus Barth, *Ephesians,* 2 vols., Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 2:438; MacArthur, *Ephesians,* p. 143; Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity,* p. 193; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Ephesians,* Everyman's

The evidence for this comes primarily from the use of the cognate verb.[39] The noun *pastor* (ποιμήν) occurs only once in the NT (Eph 4:11) in reference to a ministry in the church, but the cognate verb (ποιμαίνω) is clearly used of the ecclesiastical office. In Acts 20:28 Paul tells the Ephesian elders-overseers (Acts 20:17, 28) "to shepherd [ποιμαίνειν] the church of God." And in 1 Peter 5:2, Peter urges the elders (1 Pet 5:1) in his audience to "shepherd [ποιμάνατε] the flock of God among you." Also, BDAG defines the noun ποιμήν as "guardian or leader,"[40] and the verb ποιμαίνω as someone who "watch[es] out for other people" in the sense of to "lead, guide, or rule."[41] These ideas of leadership correspond well with the role of the elder-overseer in passages such as 1 Timothy 3:1–7; 5:17; and Titus 1:6–9. Therefore, as most would argue, it seems best to restrict the gift of pastor to the office of elder-overseer. This would then parallel the first group in Ephesians 4:11, apostles. Hardly anyone would deny that this gift was restricted to a select group of individuals who held a particular office. Clearly, there was not a gift of apostleship available generally to believers.

In the case of the evangelist the situation is not as clear. In their treatments of spiritual gifts, Walvoord and Ryrie emphasize only the gift of evangelism in discussing Ephesians 4:11, not the evangelist.[42] Therefore, the question remains whether it is proper to speak of gifted

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Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 72; Vaughan, *Ephesians,* p. 94; Hendriksen, *Ephesians,* p. 412; Knight, "Two Offices," p. 10; John Murray, "Office in the Church," in *Collected Writings of John Murray,* vol. 2 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), p. 360; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 915; Mal Couch, ed., *A Biblical Theology of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), p. 165; Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 132; Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts,* p. 323; Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology,* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 267; Ronald E. Baxter, *Gifts of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1983), p. 181.

[39]Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians,* pp. 347–48; Barth, *Ephesians,* 2:438; Knight, "Two Offices," pp. 9–10; Couch, *Biblical Theology of the Church*, pp. 165–66; Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts,* p. 323; Baxter, *Gifts of the Spirit,* pp. 181–82.

[40]p. 843.

[41]p. 842.

[42]John F. Walvoord, *Holy Spirit* (reprint of 1958 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 169–70; Charles C. Ryrie, *Holy Spirit,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 135; idem, *Basic Theology,* p. 373. One wonders if their emphasis on evangelism over against the evangelist might be traced, at least partly, to the influence of their teacher Lewis S. Chafer and his apparent disdain for the typical evangelist of his day. See his "False Forces in Evangelism" in *True Evangelism* (reprint of 1919 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 3–23.

for ministry. But once a church has been established and has the proper local leadership, the role of the evangelist would normally be ended.

2 Timothy 4:5

> But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The third occurrence of εὐαγγελιστής in the NT is found in 2 Timothy 4:5. Verse 5 is the last verse in a paragraph beginning in verse 1 that makes up Paul's final charge to Timothy.[89] This charge takes the form of a solemn appeal in verse 1, which is then followed by nine imperatives—five in verse 2 and four in verse 5.[90] The eighth of these imperatives calls for Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist."[91] Flanders asserts: "Although there are other interpretations of this admonition, the most obvious meaning is that Timothy was an evangelist."[92] Timothy may indeed have been gifted as an evangelist, but this is not certain. He is described as one who "served with [Paul] in the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil 2:22) and as "our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ" (1 Thess 3:2). But probably not everyone who assisted Paul in his missionary endeavors was a gifted evangelist. Whatever the case with Timothy, it is commonly understood that he was in Ephesus functioning like a pastor[93] or, more probably, Paul's apostolic representative.[94] Contrary to Flanders, the

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[89]Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* Good News Commentary (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 232; George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles,* New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 451; Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) p. 165.

[90]Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* p. 232.

[91]The aorist tense of the imperative "do" (ποίησον) probably falls into what Wallace calls the constative category, which is used for general precepts (*Grammar,* pp. 720–21). Wallace does not comment specifically on the imperative ποίησον, but he does place κήρυξον from v. 2, one of the nine imperatives in the string of vv. 1–5, in the constative category.

[92]Flanders, "The Work of the Evangelist," p. 14.

[93]Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 288; Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus,* New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), p. 245; Ryrie, *Holy Spirit,* p. 135; Barth, *Ephesians,* p. 437; *NBD*, s.v. "Evangelist," p. 348; Baxter, *Gifts of the Spirit,* p. 178; *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible,* s.v. "Evangelist," 1:730; Couch, *Biblical Theology of the Church*, p. 60.

[94]Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* p. xxxii; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,*

clause "do the work of an evangelist" is not actually identifying Timothy as an evangelist. Instead, the language more probably suggests that Timothy should do the kind of work that is normally associated with an evangelist even though he is functioning in more of a pastoral role and may not have been particularly gifted as an evangelist himself.[95] 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 danger of not pursuing the work he probably originally did with Paul on their travels together."[96] An evangelist was primarily an itinerant church planter, but Timothy is now temporarily stationed in Ephesus area, in somewhat of a supervisory role. Still, even in that work, he must not neglect the task of proclaiming the gospel of salvation to unbelievers and forming them into churches.[97]

ARE THERE EVANGELISTS IN THE CHURCH TODAY?

Although it might seem that this question would be obviously answered in the affirmative, there are those who relegate evangelists exclusively to the early church. This was the view of John Calvin, who said:

> "Evangelists" I take to be those who, although lower in rank than apostles, were next to them in office and functioned in their place…. According to this interpretation (which seems to me to be in agreement with both the words and opinion of Paul), these three functions [apostle, prophet, evangelist] were not established in the church as permanent ones, but only for that time during which churches were to be erected where none existed before, or where they were to be carried over from Moses to Christ…. I call this office "extraordinary," because in duly constituted churches it has no place.[98]

Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. lviii; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 20; Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus,* p. 32; Philip H. Towner, *1–2 Timothy & Titus,* IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 40; Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* p. 47; Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles,* p. 13; Hendriksen, *Ephesians,* p. 197; Fung, "Function or Office," p. 27.

[95]Ryrie, *Holy Spirit,* p. 135.

[96]Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* p. 288.

[97]MacArthur, *2 Timothy,* p. 185.

[98]*Institutes,* 4.3.4 in John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 1057. Calvin did not totally shut out the possibility of the evangelist: "I do not deny that the Lord has

Hodge notes that this view prevailed at the time of the Reformation.[99]

In the post-apostolic period of the early church, the evangelist was hardly mentioned.[100] Sometimes the term was used of early Christian missionaries, as, for instance, by Eusebius.[101] Eventually, the term lost its missionary sense of proclaimer of the gospel, came to be applied to a reader of the Gospels in churches, and finally, almost exclusively, was identified with the writers of the Gospels themselves.[102] The research of Kimbrell and Harber concludes that the concept of the evangelist as a preacher of the gospel was rarely identified with any historical person from the fifth through the eighteenth century.[103] Thus, it was common during the Reformation and the post Reformation period to follow the opinion of Calvin and view the evangelist as an "extraordinary office" limited to the apostolic church. For example, a 1774 document from the Baptist Association in Charleston, South Carolina, says: "The ordinary officers of the church, and the only ones now existing, are ministers, and deacons, *Phil. 1:1.* In the first gospel churches there were other officers such as apostles, prophets, and evangelists, *1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11,* who were endowed with extraordinary gifts, which were then necessary for the conformation of the gospel, but have since become extinct."[104] This viewpoint is still held by some today who

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sometimes at a later period raised up apostles, or at least evangelists in their place, as has happened in our own day. For there was need for such persons to lead the church back from the rebellion of Antichrist" (ibid.). According to the editors of the McNeill edition of the *Institutes,* Calvin was chiefly referring to Luther, whom he praises and calls "a distinguished apostle of Christ" (ibid., n. 4).

[99]*Ephesians,* p. 224.

[100]*Encyclopedia of Early Christianity,* s.v. "Evangelist," by Everett Ferguson, p. 330; *Encyclopedia of the Early Church,* s.v. "Evangelists," by R. Trevijano, 1:306.

[101]*Encyclopedia of Early Christianity,* s.v. "Evangelist," p. 330. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History,* 3.37.2 in Loeb Classical Library, 1:289.

[102]*Encyclopedia of Early Christianity,* s.v. "Evangelist," p. 330; Frank H. Harber, "An Examination of the Historical Development of the Ministry of the Evangelist Within the Christian Church" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), pp. 40–43.

[103]Kimbrell, "Investigation into the Changing Concepts of an Evangelist," p. 95; Harber, "Ministry of the Evangelist," p. 6.

[104]"A Summary of Church Discipline Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church," in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life,* ed. Mark Dever (n.p.: Center for Church Reform, 2001), pp. 119–20. However, the minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association of 1771 note the appointment of one of their ministers, Morgan Edwards, as an "Evangelist." See *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from A.D. 1701, to A.D. 1807,"* ed. A. D. Gillettep (reprint of 1851 ed.; Atlas, MI: Baptist Book Trust), p. 119.

believe that the NT evangelist was inextricably tied to the office of the apostle, and so once they died out, the evangelists disappeared as well.[105]

The position that contends evangelists became extinct with the passing of the apostles is not without some merit. Since it is commonly held by cessationists that two of the categories of gifted individuals in Ephesians 4:11, apostles and prophets, are not present today, and if evangelists are closely connected to apostles, then it is not impossible that evangelists also became extinct with the apostles. But this view is not likely to be correct. While it is true there is compelling evidence for limiting apostles and prophets to the first century,[106] other considerations suggest this is not true of evangelists. As we have noted, Ephesians 2:20 lists apostles and prophets as the *two* foundational gifts whose purpose was limited to the early decades of the church. Evangelists are not, of course, placed by Scripture in this strictly foundational role. While evangelists in the first century carried on the foundational work of the apostles by taking the gospel to new groups of people, they were not, by function, involved in providing the new revelation essential to the beginning of the church. If the main role of evangelists in the first century was as missionary church planters, as I have contended, then there would be no reason why their particular function would not be needed throughout the church age; in fact, one would think they would be essential.

MODERN DAY EVANGELISTS

The revival of the use of the term *evangelist* as applied to contemporary preachers of the gospel did not come about until the nineteenth century. The research of Kimbrell has shown that before then well-known figures who are today commonly identified as evangelists did not apply the term to themselves or to each other.[107] Amazingly, John Wesley never actually used the term of himself or any of the Methodist preachers in his day, including George Whitfield.[108] And the same was true of Whitfield, who apparently only used the term of the Gospel

[105]E.g., Ridderbos, *Paul,* p. 454; Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity,* pp. 191–92.

[106]See, e.g., Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), pp. 89–102; idem, "Where Have All the Spiritual Gifts Gone?" *Modern Reformation,* September–October 2001, pp. 20–24; Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts,* pp. 46–85; Stott, *Ephesians,* pp. 160–63.

[107]Kimbrell, "Investigation into the Changing Concepts of an Evangelist," pp. 81–96.

[108]Ibid., pp. 87–90.

writers.[109] But in the nineteenth century, probably as a result of the Second Great Awakening and especially the ministry of Charles Finney, many itinerant preachers were identified as evangelists.[110]

From the time of Finney "evangelists" have commonly been associated with revivalism, not their NT role of church planting. A true revival cannot, of course, be worked up, but is a "surprising work of God," to use Jonathan Edwards's words; they are confined to what Solomon Stoddard called "special seasons.[111] Murray clarifies:

> What happens in revivals is not to be seen as something miraculously different from the regular experience of the church. The difference lies in degree, not in kind. In an 'outpouring of the Spirit' spiritual influence is more widespread, convictions are deeper, and feelings more intense, but all this is only a heightening of normal Christianity. True revivals are 'extraordinary,' yet what is experienced at such times is not different in essence from the spiritual experience that belongs to Christians at other times.[112]

But after the time of Finney and the adoption of his "new measures," "seasons of revival became 'revival meetings.' Instead of being 'surprising' they might now be announced in advance."[113] Evangelists were now seen as the professional ministers who could best promote revivals, those who had the special skills necessary to bring them about.[114] Thus the evangelist was seen as indispensable to the work of the local church. Echoing that sentiment, Van Gelderen says: "An assembly that refuses to use the gift of the evangelist is incomplete in following Christ's plan for the church. This is disobedience."[115] It is probably this view of the evangelist, a promoter of revivals, which is most common in fundamentalism and evangelicalism today.[116] The evangelist is

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[109]Ibid., pp. 92–93.

[110]Ibid., p. 143; Harber, "Ministry of the Evangelist," pp. 84–85.

[111]Quoted in Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994), p. xvii.

[112]Ibid., p. 23.

[113]Ibid., p. xviii.

[114]Kimbrell, "Investigation into the Changing Concepts of an Evangelist," p. 131.

[115]*Revival and Evangelism,* p. 91.

[116]See, e.g., Rice, *The Evangelist,* p. 139; Jerry Drace, "The Work of the Evangelist," *Preaching,* January–February 1999, pp. 34–36; Harber, "Ministry of the Evangelis," p. 4; Bill Hall, "Why Churches Should Use Evangelists," *The Cutting Edge,"* vol. 5, 1993, available online at http://www.f-b-f.org/sermon.asp?id=35; Flanders, "The Work of the Evangelist," pp. 15–16. Flanders goes so far as to say that the apostle Paul conducted revival meetings (ibid., p. 15).

often looked upon as someone who is involved in mass evangelism.[117]

However, as we have sought to demonstrate, these modern day "evangelists" do not seem to fit the pattern of what the NT means by evangelist, if we are right in seeing the term as more correctly applied to the missionary church planter. Perhaps we should follow the lead of Lloyd-Jones and McCune who believe that the modern "evangelist" would be better identified as an exhorter (Rom 12:8).[118] As previously observed, Van Gelderen views his responsibility as an "evangelist" to be twofold: "equipping the saints for gospel usefulness" and "preaching the gospel to lost sinners."[119] The local church is certainly free, if it chooses, to bring in an "exhorter-evangelist" to aid it in carrying out the Great Commission since "equipping the saints for gospel usefulness" and "preaching the gospel to lost sinners" are worthy and necessary goals. As long as any such ministry is theologically sound and properly related to the local church, an "exhorter-evangelist" can have a legitimate ministry.

CONCLUSION

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. As such, these gifted men were, and still are, truly vital to the NT church. This work of evangelizing the lost and forming them into local NT churches deserves the prayers and support of all members of the body of Christ. May God in his grace give us more of these gifted men.

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[117]Van Gelderen, *Revival and Evangelism,* p. 6; Flanders, "The Work of the Evangelist," p. 15; Rice, *The Evangelist,* pp. 93–109.

[118]*Christian Unity,* p. 192; Rolland D. McCune, "Systematic Theology II (class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, June 2001), p. 203.

[119]*Revival and Evangelism,* p. 16.