

# WHERE IS THE EVANGELIST?

by  
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The Bible lists for us in Ephesians 4:11-12 several kinds of preachers that God has given to the churches for their edification in the New Testament age. There were “*apostles*” (sent ones), especially the witnesses of His resurrection appointed by the Lord Jesus Himself. There were “*prophets*” (forth-speakers), and there were “*evangelists*” (tellers of good news). Then there were “*pastors*” (shepherds) and “*teachers*.” Of course, the Bible-believing churches of our day still have pastors, whom many think are the same as the teachers according to the Greek in this passage. The original apostles passed off the scene before the dawn of the second century, but their ministry remains with us in the scriptures they wrote by the inspiration of God. The others who wrote the New Testament scriptures (such as Mark and Luke) were prophets who spoke God’s Word, and their gift has also passed away. Some see aspects of the apostolic gift in missionary efforts, since the word “*apostle*” has essentially the same meaning as “*missionary*.” Some see Spirit-directed and empowered speech short of divine inspiration as a form of the prophetic gift, citing verses in I Corinthians 11, 12, 13, and 14. But basically, Bible students see the apostle and the prophet as first-century gifts to the churches continuing their ministry only in scripture, and the evangelist and pastor as present-day instruments of God among His people.

The office of the evangelist, however, has become controversial among certain Bible-believers, and even among fundamentalists. Some churches no longer invite evangelists to preach for them or to lead them in revival campaigns. Some seminaries teach future pastors that the evangelist is a gift that has passed away. The evangelist is being rejected because of two different but equally mistaken kinds of voices. One comes from pastors of good evangelistic churches that see no need for periodic revival meetings since their soul-winning programs go on year-round. Sometimes they say that the Bible term “*evangelist*” means what we call a missionary today, and that those we have called evangelists actually have no place in the New Testament program. The other voice comes from an entirely different segment of the fundamentalist movement that has been overly influenced by Calvinism. They see the modern “*evangelist*” as what Dr. Louis Chafer called one of the “*false forces*” in evangelism, and they consider his campaigns, style of preaching, and altar calls as blasphemous insults to the sovereignty of God. These brethren believe that the New Testament evangelist has ceased as an office in the work of God.

Although many men still travel and preach under the title “*evangelist*” around the world, their calling and work is in serious danger of being undermined in the minds of future fundamentalists. Already we are finding fewer evangelists in places they once were commonly seen: in conferences as speakers, in churches leading revival campaigns, in the leadership of the fundamentalist movement. We are also finding evangelists misused and their office misunderstood and demeaned. The first and most important place to find the evangelist, however, is in the New Testament, because if we cannot find him there, then we should all stop looking for and using him. But we do find him in the New Testament, and our need of him among the fundamentalist churches is greater than ever!

## **Philip the Evangelist**

The office of the evangelist is introduced to us in scripture through a man named Philip. In Acts 21, we are told that,

*“Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and . . . entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.”* (verse 8)

This was not Philip the Apostle, but Philip the Deacon, “*one of the seven*” chosen for that responsibility in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6). It was during the persecution of Saul that this Philip entered into his evangelistic work. Three times in Acts 8, where his early evangelistic work is recorded, the Greek word *euangelizomai* is used. This is the word from which we get our words evangelize, evangelism, and

evangelist. It means to tell good news. It is used in verses 12, 35, and 40.

*“But when they believed Philip preaching [evangelizing] the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”* (verse 12)

*“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached [evangelized] unto him Jesus.”* (verse 35)

*“But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached [evangelized] in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.”* (verse 40)

Then in Acts 21 we find Philip in Caesarea where he is called *‘the evangelist.’* It is obvious that Philip’s work typifies the work of an evangelist since the word in its various forms is so closely associated with him. And what was his work? He traveled from place to place in order to proclaim the Gospel (“good news”) of Jesus Christ. The evangelist’s ministry follows naturally the mandate of our Lord that we preach the Gospel to everyone in the world. With this command dominating our life and work, it would be expected that some of us would be gifted to proclaim the Gospel to the masses in a clear, scriptural, and convincing way. Philip was one man who had such a gift.

### **Paul and Timothy**

In his last epistle, Paul told Timothy to *“do the work of an evangelist”* (II Timothy 4:5). Although there are other interpretations of this admonition, the most obvious meaning is that Timothy was an evangelist, and that Paul his teacher, was an evangelist, too.

The word *euangelizomai* is used to describe Paul’s work many times in the Book of Acts and in the apostle’s own epistles.

*“And there they preached the gospel [evangelized].”* (Acts 14:7)

*“We also are men of like passions with you, and preach [evangelize] unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God . . .”* (Acts 14:15)

*“When they had preached the gospel [evangelized] to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra . . .”* (Acts 14:21)

*“Paul . . . continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching [evangelizing] the word of the Lord . . .”* (Acts 15:35)

*“. . . he preached [evangelized] unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”* (Acts 17:18)

Evangelism is what Paul by divine inspiration called his own work in the Greek of Romans 1:15, Romans 15:20, I Corinthians 9:16, I Corinthians 15:1-2, II Corinthians 10:16, II Corinthians 11:7, Galatians 1:8-11, Galatians 1:15-16, Galatians 1:23, Galatians 4:13, and Ephesians 3:8. The verse in Ephesians says,

*“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach [evangelize] among the Gentiles . . .”*

What was Paul’s work? It was evangelism, traveling from place to place, publicly proclaiming the Gospel.

There are two Greek words in commonly used by the New Testament writers to describe preaching.

They are *kerusso* and *euangelizo* (another form of which is *euangelizomai*). The former conveys the general idea of heralding or proclaiming. The latter means delivering good news or a joyful message. Of course, the title “*evangelist*” refers by definition to a man who delivers good news, which, in the Biblical context, is what we call the Gospel (“*euangelion*”). Although believers other than evangelists preached the Gospel, the use of the verb repeatedly to describe a man’s work is significant in identifying and defining him as an evangelist. In fact, *euangelizo* is almost always used in the New Testament to describe an evangelist’s work.

Clearly, Paul was an evangelist. He was a missionary, too, in that he was *sent* many places to preach the Gospel (the words *apostle* from Greek and *missionary* from Latin both mean *one sent*), but his work was that of an evangelist. That work is described in Acts 17:2-3.

*“And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”*

He went from place to place, proclaiming the Gospel publicly in a *reasonable, scriptural, clear, and decisive* way. The results of his work were converts to Christianity and new local churches.

Twice Paul served churches as their pastor for a period of time, in Corinth (Acts 18:11) and in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). But most of his life, Paul was traveling, going from town to town to preach the Gospel. See how he described his work in II Corinthians 11.

*“In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.”* (verses 26-28)

His was the work of an itinerant Gospel preacher, and his product was local churches.

Some will say to this that the evangelist is just a church-planting missionary. But the method of Paul was different from the method of most missionaries today. Paul did not begin with a home Bible study; he began with public synagogue services. He did not live for years in one location while nurturing a little flock of young believers into a self-sustaining independent church. He usually moved from place to place holding evangelistic meetings. Those meetings generally resulted in Christian congregations, over which he appointed pastors before he left the area.

*“And when they [Barnabas and Paul] had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”* (Acts 14:23)

It was a common practice of the early evangelist to appoint the first pastors of infant churches. Paul wrote Titus about this responsibility.

*“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee . . .”* (Titus 1:5)

Congregations of young Christians were not ready to appoint their own elders (bishops, pastors), and they relied upon the evangelist that led them to Christ to choose who their leaders would be when he left. The evangelist was a man gifted to preach the Gospel with special effectiveness. He was an

itinerant preacher who held public Gospel meetings. It was through evangelists that the Gospel saw its greatest advances, and that nearly all New Testament churches were started.

But is the modern-day “evangelist” what Bible evangelists were? For example, did Paul hold meetings in already-existing churches? In Acts 15:36, Paul said to Barnabas, his evangelistic co-worker,

*“Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.”*

Acts 20 tells about Paul’s visit to the church at Troas.

*“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”* (verse 7)

The epistles of Paul record his plans for preaching visits to the churches in Rome (Romans 1:10), Corinth (I Corinthians 16:5), and Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 2:17). Visits like his brought rebuke and exhortation of the saints by the evangelist, as well as help in winning the lost.

*“Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.”* (Romans 1:13)

*“For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.”* (I Corinthians 4:17-19)

*“For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbiting, whisperings, swellings, tumults: And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.”* (II Corinthians 12:20-21)

These return visits were *revival* meetings, and Paul was an evangelist of the sort Americans knew for many years. Whitefield, Nettleton, Finney, Knapp, and Moody were classic Biblical evangelists. Their calling and gift was to preach the Gospel. Their fruit was saved souls and new churches.

### **The Great Evangelist**

All evangelists have a perfect Model to follow. The original evangelist was the Lord Jesus Christ. Of Him, Isaiah prophesied,

*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”* (Isaiah 52:7)

The Greek word for evangelizing is used of Jesus in the book of Luke five times.

*“And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel [evangelize] to the poor . . .”* (4:17-18)

*“And he said unto them, I must preach [evangelize] the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.” (4:43)*

*“Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.” (7:22)*

*“And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel [evangelizing], and healing every where.” (9:6)*

*“And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel [evangelized], the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders . . .” (20:1)*

Think of it. What did Jesus do? He traveled about preaching the Gospel. That is the work of an evangelist!

### **Evangelists and Pastors**

It wasn't many years ago that modern-day evangelists operated more according to the pattern of their ancient counterparts. They would come into a community and arrange to hold public Gospel meetings. Often they had the cooperation and help of local pastors, but not always. Night after night, the evangelist would preach to whatever crowd he could gather under a tent, in a big tabernacle, at a rented school building, in a public auditorium, or at a local church. Sometimes he would preach repeatedly for several weeks. Sometimes he would stay for a shorter period. If the Lord blessed as he hoped, there would be a good group of new converts in that community when he left, which could be organized into a new church, or channeled into existing orthodox churches in the area.

Few evangelists operate this way now, partly because they do not know they should, and partly because fundamentalists no longer support this kind of evangelism. We all have an idea about what happened to old-time evangelism. First, the number of Spirit-filled men of integrity doing this kind of work diminished, with the gap being filled to some degree by men of lesser character operating in the flesh instead of under the power of God. Then new ideas about how to evangelize the lost arose to replace the old ideas. Next Billy Graham introduced the concept of ecumenical evangelism, and offended thousands of fundamentalists who saw cooperation with and endorsement of liberals as a terrible defection from the truth. Many good men became disgusted with mass evangelism. A few evangelists promised to maintain a separatist stand in area-wide crusades, but their efforts and the direction of their ministries eventually disappointed most of their early supporters. The time came when an evangelist became, in many fundamentalist minds, merely a “special speaker” for local-church events or for summer camp. Revival campaigns were shortened considerably, with their emphasis sidetracked from preaching the Gospel and the winning of the lost. The vision of the evangelist has been short-circuited so that he now comes to a town, not to reach the masses, but to assist a pastor in strengthening the program of the local church. No wonder some have come to see no need for the evangelist or for evangelistic crusades, local-church or area-wide! No wonder some fail to see any Biblical office in the trimmed-down role of what we now consider to be evangelists! The Biblical pattern has been abandoned.

In the New Testament, the evangelist had some prominence above local pastors. This is why he is listed in Ephesians 4 *before* the “pastors and teachers” (verse 11). He certainly exercised a measure of freedom in his ministry from the control and direction of local pastors. He was subject to his local church in the same sense that any member is, submitting to its discipline, adhering to its doctrine, and reporting to its people. But he was not confined in his work to meeting the needs and satisfying the interests of the churches. The pastors' work centered more around these concerns. The evangelist was a

Gospel preacher, sent to spread the Good News in a public way to the masses, and especially gifted to do so. The pastors (often chosen from among the congregations of the new churches spawned by the evangelists' ministry) acted as shepherds of the flocks after the evangelist left. Every pastor was to be evangelistic in his personal life and in the emphasis of his ministry, and each congregation was to be an evangelistic church, reaching its whole area with the Gospel. We see this at Ephesus (where Paul served as a pastor for a while) in Acts 19:10. We see it also in Thessalonica, where the work became a model for evangelistic churches.

*“And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.”* (I Thessalonians 1:6-8)

Every pastor and every church should be evangelistic, but special leadership in this all-important matter of spreading the Gospel should be given to the evangelist.

There is a parallel to the evangelist-pastor relationship in the realm of politics. Every political party or movement has “big voices” that articulate especially well the views of the movement, and also “local leaders” that organize and direct the work of the faithful in particular districts. Some big Republican voices today are George W. Bush (of course), William Bennett, Steve Forbes, and maybe Trent Lott. Big Democrat voices are Hillary Clinton, Bill Bradley, Dick Gephardt, and Ted Kennedy. These people are persuasive, and are invited to address rallies around the country to motivate party-members and to win people over to the movement. The local leadership of political movements are state and county office-holders as well as party chairman and precinct captains. The party could not succeed without both the big voices and the local leaders. The Christian movement finds its big voices in the evangelists, and its local leaders in the pastors. They need each other, and the Cause needs them both functioning exactly as the Lord ordained.

Ephesians 4:11-12 also teaches that the work of the evangelist and that of the pastor overlap somewhat. Both strive for “*the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . .*” This wonderful progression is vital to the health and growth of the churches and to the advancement of the Gospel: perfecting the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body. Perfecting saints is the business of revival. It results in Christians doing the work of ministry. When perfected saints do ministry work, the result is the edifying (building up) of the local church (the body). The promotion of this process is the work *both* of the pastor and of the evangelist. And both will be needed if the work is to be done right.

### **The Return of the Evangelist**

When the evangelist is recognized in the New Testament, he should be given his appointed role in the carrying out of God's program. Fundamentalists logically are the people that would first be expected to do this, but sadly, in some of our camps and circles, the Biblical evangelist is an endangered species. The charismatics and even the ecumenists seem to be giving evangelists due prominence, while fundamentalists seem to be losing their understanding of their office. Here is what Bible-believers should do about the evangelist as a result of finding him in scripture:

1. The New Testament office of evangelist should be studied, explained, and supported in fundamentalist training institutions.
2. Every church should invite sound and spiritual evangelists to preach for them, and to lead them in revival campaigns.
3. Pastors should lead the churches to help evangelists launch out into aggressive efforts in places where the Gospel is little known.
4. Evangelists should seek from the scriptures for a new vision of their own ministry that will compel

them to attempt great things for God.

5. The fundamentalist movement should give evangelists of proven integrity, humility, and enduement the leadership we need to keep our emphasis on the fulfillment of our Lord's Great Commission.

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