

# How Do We Organise the Church?

In the past two lessons we have looked at the role of the elders and the deacons in the church. Now we want to look at the role of the evangelist or preacher. We hesitate to use the word “minister” to refer to this person because that word means “servant” and all Christians are servants. No man is called “the minister” of a church in the Bible.

In the last lesson, we saw that the proper use of the word “pastor” is a description of the “elder” as those words along with bishop, overseer, and shepherd are synonymous. The word is never used to describe the preacher or evangelist. The role of elders/pastors is never singular either. These men always serve in a plurality.



## The Role of the Evangelist in the Church

We have been taught by example in most churches that one man is of primary importance. He makes the critical decisions and is the public face of the church in the community. He is the man to call when there is a problem. Often this is a paid position, and a Bible college education has been earned, and so he is considered to be “the professional.”

In this lesson, we do not mean to discredit any other church for their leadership model. We do not mean to discredit any man serving in any role. We are not studying this lesson to criticise others. Our desire in these past three lessons is simply to look at the Bible and see what it has to say about church leadership.

It is our firm belief that the Bible is the Word of God. We believe it to be completely accurate and without error. Though the Lord’s Church is not perfect in this world because it is made up of imperfect people, the idea of the Church and the pattern for the Church is perfect.

As difficult as it is for us to do, it is our desire to read the Bible as much as possible for what it meant when it was originally written. Let us try to remove the lens of culture and see what God intends for His Church.

With these thoughts in mind, “what does the Bible say about the role of the evangelist?”

### Personal Reflection

Think about the churches of which you have been a part. How many of them had a preacher (or a man called minister or pastor or evangelist or preacher?) What was their role? What do you remember best about them?

## The Noun “Evangelist” is used Three Times in the NT



**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.”

**Eph 4:11-16**, “(11) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (14) so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (15) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

**2 Tim 4:1-5**, “(1) I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (3) For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, (4) and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (5) As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

1. Philip is called an evangelist in Acts 21:8. What do we see him doing in Acts 8:4-13 and 8:26-40?
2. Timothy is called an evangelist in 2 Timothy 4:5. Read the following passages and describe what Timothy is doing. (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Cor 16:10; 1 Thess 3:2; Phil 2:22; 2 Tim 4:1-5)
3. From Eph 4:11-16, what do we learn about the role of the evangelist?

## Where Did Our Ideas Originate?

We can search through the Scriptures in vain to find the position of the modern senior minister/pastor/preacher (or whatever else he might be called.) This is not to say that the individuals who fill these positions do not love the Lord with all their hearts and minds. They usually want to serve God and lead people to Jesus. The problem is not always with the person, but rather the system. Is it a Biblical system?



It is the desire of God for His people to rely upon Him; however it seems to be that human nature is not satisfied, but wants someone that they can touch and see to be their leader. In the Old Testament during the days of Samuel, God wanted his people to simply follow his leadership, but instead they called out for a king. That call for kingship was one that was filled with tragedy for Israel (1 Sam 8).

Within the Lord's church there was no official human leadership until the 2nd century A.D. In the New Testament there were elders and evangelists working within the churches, but they were servant-leaders. They did not fill an "office," but rather fulfilled the function of preparing the flock for works of service.

### 4. What common themes do you see in leadership in the church after reading 1 Cor 11:1,2; 2 Thess 3:7-9; 1 Tim 4:12; and 1 Pet 5:1-3?

By the middle of the 3rd century A.D. the system of a graded hierarchy was coming into use and by the 4th century this model of Church leadership had been cemented. Bishops became powerful political figures and stood at the head of the Church. Under these bishops were presbyters or elders and under them were the deacons. The one bishop rule was established throughout the Roman empire. Bishop Cyprian argued that there was an unbroken succession of bishops from Peter to the present (Ann Fremantle, ed. *A Treasury of Early Christianity*.)

1 Cor.11:1-2, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you."

2 Thess 3:7-9, "For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate."

1 Tim 4:12, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

1 Pet 5:1-3, "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

Though the Bible is clear that all Christians are priests (1 Pet 2:9) there became a distinction between what became known as clergy and laity. It is important to note that these are NOT Biblical terms and in fact are contrary to Biblical teaching. Still, there became a division among Christians where one group of people were trained and considered “special” while others were simple laity and unable to interpret the Bible or exercise leadership in the church.

By the Middle Ages, the presbyters began to represent the priests who officiated in local congregations while the bishop took care of political duties. The priest stood as God’s representative in the local church and controlled the Lord’s Supper and baptisms (Viola, Frank, *Pagan Christianity*.)

Protestant Reformers changed the vocabulary of the church. John Calvin said that those who lead should not be called “priests,” but rather “pastors” since the Bible called Jesus the Great Shepherd. Martin Luther did not like the name “priest” either and adopted the terms “preacher,” “minister,” and “Pastor” to refer to the one man who led in the local congregation.

By the 18th century the term “Pastor” became the common word used to describe the local leader in most Protestant Churches. He was the spokesman for the church, provided the sermons, and was a clergyman. This thinking still dominates in many churches and has caused Christians to think that the “Pastor” is the expert. He is “in charge.” He is the one who delivers the “Word of God” to the people. We continue to have a distinction between clergy and laity.



### A Return to the Old Paths

Is it possible to restore the church to what God originally designed? Does it even matter?

We may need to adopt some old ideas (1st century ones), but if God designed a perfect system then let us follow His blueprint.

Evangelists are servants of God, who proclaim the Good News. The Greek word *kerux* means a herald, a public proclaimer. The Lord authorized (1 Tim. 2:7) and sent out His preachers or "heralds" into all the world (Rom. 10:14-18). Their sole work is to proclaim His message, the gospel (2 Tim. 2:1-7; 4:1-5).

The word "evangelist" is from the Greek word *euangelistes* and simply means a messenger of good. Christ gave evangelists (Eph. 4:11-12) to bear His good news, the "gospel." Paul warned Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (1 Tim. 4:5).

The instruction to pay Christian workers (1 Cor. 9:14) does not make them church employees. A preacher is not an employee of any church, but a servant of the Lord (1 Tim. 4:6). He is accountable to the Lord, entrusted to do the Lord's work and not "entangle himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3-4). The Scriptural relationship between a preacher and the Christians that support him is that of fellow workers in the Lord. (1 Cor. 9:6-14; Phil. 1:5-7; 4:15-19).