

Shepherding the Flock

*"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."
(Acts 20:28)*



Elders and Evangelists

In previous lessons, we have learned that elders lead by example and equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). Elders work to assist every member to grow to be more like Christ and to use their gifts for Him. Also listed with the elders in Ephesians 4:11 are evangelists who also work to build and mature the church.

The relationship of elders and evangelists in churches has not always been understood and has in some instances even been needlessly contentious. Some of this relates to struggles over organisational hierarchy when elders and evangelists have been more concerned with their titles than understanding their roles of leadership and service within the church. This tension has sometimes led to ineffectiveness and frustration for elders, evangelists, and churches.

In this lesson, we use the word evangelist because it is a biblical word used for a leadership role within the church. In some churches these men are called "pastors," but in our studies we have learned that the word elder and pastor are synonymous so that the use of the word "pastor" to describe one individual in the church is not proper biblical usage.

Relationship Between Evangelists and Elders

Evangelists (ones who tell good news) are typically understood to be men who win the lost, establish new churches, and lead these churches to a position of maturity and orderliness (Titus 1:5).

While we may often think of evangelists as being itinerant, it is not unusual for them to spend a number of years in one location. The evangelist Philip first went to Caesarea in Acts 8:40 and twenty years later he was still there in Acts 21:8. Even the apostle Paul who traveled across Gentile lands establishing new congregations, spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31).

An evangelist does not necessarily need to depart a church as soon as elders are selected. Timothy, the evangelist stayed in Ephesus even though the congregation had elders.

While elders concern themselves only with the work of the congregation of which they are a part, evangelists may need to travel to teach and preach elsewhere and may not be as permanent in a particular local congregation as the elders.

Common Church Leadership Model Followed Today

Today's churches are often led by one man who serves in a position that is sort of an amalgamation of the biblical roles of evangelist, pastor/teacher, and deacon coupled with the current cultural views of successful secular organisational leadership.

He is a paid professional typically trained in a Bible College or seminary and is expected to work much like the CEO of a company with the success or failure of the congregation falling on his shoulders.

Churches usually set these people apart with titles such as Pastor, Reverend, or Minister. They may even wear clothing that distinguishes them from the rest of the church. These men do the preaching, teaching, and pastoral work of the church while setting the focus and agenda of the congregation which becomes mostly passive, remains immature, and is totally dependent upon them.

If the Scripture is our guide we must reject this type of organisation as non-biblical. The role of elders who serve in plurality (with any evangelists) is to spiritually mature and equip the whole church to share the Gospel, use their gifts for Christ, and serve one another in love.

Some of the responsibilities of elders and evangelists overlap as both are to teach and refute false teaching. Both are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11ff so that evangelists also must be concerned with equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

1. What did Paul mean when he wrote Titus to “put what remained into order?” (Titus 1:5)
2. What are some reasons why an evangelist might spend a significant amount of time in one location?
3. What are some ways in which the role of elders and evangelists overlap? (Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 4:16)
4. What instruction is Timothy given in 2 Timothy 2:2?

The relationship between elders and evangelists is at least in part one of mutual accountability. In 1 Timothy 5:19-20 we read, *“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”* Elders do sometimes fall into sin and the evangelist can rebuke them for this if the charge is valid and is shown to be so by a minimum of two or three witnesses. This rebuke would need to take place before the entire church since Paul says it must be done *“in the presence of all.”*



As Paul writes to encourage and instruct Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 he tells him to preach the word, to be ready in season and out of season to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. While the lost are primarily in view here, the power of the Gospel being preached by a faithful evangelist confronts all who hear, even the elders. Likewise, the elders as teachers within the church are to be obeyed as we submit to them. Evangelists as members of churches and as Christians need to submit to the authority of the elders.

In 2 Timothy 4:5, Timothy is told to fulfill his “ministry.” For this reason sometimes men who labour within churches are called “ministers.” While it is appropriate to call them “a minister” it is not appropriate to call them “the minister.” The word minister means servant and every Christian has a ministry to fulfill.

The mutual accountability is also seen in the appointment process. In 1 Timothy 1:22 in the context of rebuking an elder, Paul tells Timothy, *“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.”* The evangelist Timothy evidently would be involved in the laying on of hands on the elders during their appointment.

In Titus 1:5 we find, *“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—”* Here the evangelist, Titus is told to put the church into order including the instruction to *“appoint elders.”*

Timothy the evangelist had the elders lay hands on him apparently to appoint him to his role as evangelist. Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14, *“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”* So we see evangelists laying hands on and appointing elders and elders laying hands on and appointing evangelists supporting mutual accountability.

5. Why is it a serious matter to bring a charge against an elder?
6. Why is Timothy given permission to rebuke an elder who persists in sin?
7. Why was Timothy instructed to “not be hasty in the laying on of hands?”
8. What is meant by mutual accountability?
9. In churches we find both the extremes of elders who completely rule and oppress an evangelist that labours among them and elders who are completely passive allowing an evangelist to rule over them. Describe the biblical relationship between the elders and evangelist and how these extremes can be avoided.