

Role of Evangelists and Elders

Tonight's class will be more teaching than preaching. My topic is the Role of Evangelists and Elders in the NT. We had a class on this during the Shepherding Series last summer, but the elders thought it would be a good idea to look at it again especially in light of our current circumstance of elder-only leadership while looking for a new evangelist. We have no idea how long the search will take. Those of us who were here in 2003/2004 remember it took nearly a year from the time Kevin Hutto stepped down as our ministry leader until the time Richard got here. God will lead us to the right couple at the right time. It may take a month. It may take a year. In the meantime we should all remain faithful. *God works everything out for good.* We should also remain busy doing the Lord's work. *If God is for us, who can be against us?* Amen? In our current situation, I think it will help us to look at how evangelists and elders functioned in the NT. I hope it will increase your faith during our transition period. I am going to use an enormous amount of Scriptures tonight. Don't feel the need to write them all down. We emailed the lesson and will post it on the website with the recording.

Let's start with evangelists.

The word "evangelist" appears 3 times in the NT. Acts 20:8 (Philip – one of the 7), Eph 4:11 (listing church leaders who equip the saints) and 2 Tim 4:5 (Timothy urged to do the work of an evangelist and fulfill his ministry). The meaning is easy – one who evangelizes – who spreads the gospel – the good news. Proclaims it publicly. Growing the church. Planting new churches. That is the primary and central role of an evangelist. Let's look at some examples of NT leaders filling this role in the church.

Peter (& John) – Act 2:14 & :41; Acts 3:12 & 4:4 – He preached & the church grew

Philip – Acts 8:4-8 (Samaria); v.26-39 (Ethiopian eunuch); v.40 (Azotus and all the towns to Caesarea)

Paul & Barnabas – Acts 11:25-26 (Antioch in Syria – great numbers), Acts 13:1-3, 5 (Cyprus), 13:16 & 44, v.49 (Antioch in Pisidia – whole city, whole region); 14:1 (Iconium – a great number);

Paul & Silas - Acts 16:11 – 40 (Philippi); 17:1-9 (Thess); :10-15 (Berea); :16-34 (Athens); 18:1-17 (Corinth); 19:1-41, esp v.10 (Ephesus)

What do we see from these scriptures?

- 1. Broad range in terms of length of service in one place.** Peter in Jerusalem Acts 2 to Acts 15, but 12:15?). [~20 yrs] Philip moves about in Acts 8, then appears to settle down in Caesarea (Acts 8:40 to Acts 21:8).[~10 yrs] Paul: Acts 11:26, 13:1, 14:26-28, 15:35, 18:22-23 (Antioch - home base for several years); Act 13 & 14 (brief stays in each city), 16:18 (Philippi – many days), Acts 17:2 (3 weeks in Thessalonica; Berea and Athens probably also brief); 18:11 (1 ½ years Corinth); 19:10 (2+ years in Ephesus);[~times in different places of varying length] Timothy's assignment in Ephesus did not last too long (from 1 Tim 1:3 to 2 Tim 4:9-12).[~relatively short]
- 2. Broad range of ages.** Can be young like Timothy (1 Tim 4:12) or older with a family like Peter (1 Cor 9:5) and Philip (Acts 21:9). Many appear to be single like Paul (& Barnabas 1 Cor 9:6) perhaps making it easier to move about.
- 3. Job Description** – Some believe everything in 1 & 2 Tim and Titus is the job description of an evangelist. Others believe these books are specific Apostolic instructions of Paul to Timothy & Titus, and don't necessarily describe the church office of evangelist. Either way, these books emphasize the primary role of preaching and teaching the Word. 1 Tim 4:11 (command & teach), 6:2 (teach and urge); 2 Tim 2:14 (remind & charge), 4:2 (preach the Word); Titus 2:1 (teach sound doctrine); 2:15 (declare, exhort and rebuke). Other responsibilities are included - training reliable men to teach (2 Tim 2:2) and recognizing and appointing elders (1 Tim 3:1ff & Titus 1:5ff). Perhaps these books describe a broader role than purely an "evangelist" to encompass what Paul calls "being a good servant (or minister) of Christ" (1 Tim 4:6) or "fulfilling your ministry" (2 Tim 4:5). Certainly Richard filled this broader leadership role for us. We want our new evangelist to also fill this same broader leadership role with primary emphasis on his core role of evangelism. Amen?

4. Questions? Appointment of Elders in absence of an Evangelist

Now let's look at elders. 3 words are used interchangeably in the NT to describe elders. Like "evangelist" these tell us much about what elders do. Elder or presbyter means *older man* suggesting experience and wisdom. Overseer or Bishop – who exercises oversight – decision makers. Shepherd or Pastor – who cares for the church. Pastor does NOT mean minister the way the religious world uses that term. A Pastor in the Bible is not the evangelist or preacher; Pastors are the elders or overseers. Alan, Steve G., Mike and me are the pastors of our church. The shepherds. Amen.

1. Let's look at scriptures about NT elders

Acts 14:23 – P&B appointed elders (not evangelists) in every town where they planted churches. Paul later came back to strengthen these churches, but each time on his way to new places (Acts 15:41 & 18:23).

Acts 15:6 – the apostles & elders gather to consider and decide the question. Acts 16:4 also indicates the apostles and elders made the decision. Evangelists in the Jerusalem Church are not mentioned. As we saw with Peter in the early chapters of Acts, Apostles were witnesses to the Resurrection and thus fulfilled the role of evangelist in the early church. However, some of them eventually became elders. Peter (1 Pet 5:5) and John (2 & 3 John :1). Acts 15 is more than 15 years after Peter's sermons in Acts 2 & 3. Not sure when he and John became elders.

Acts 20:17 – Paul calls for the elders of the church in Ephesus – evangelists are not mentioned. Paul obviously served as their evangelist in Acts 19, but he departed in Acts 20:1 and was now traveling to Jerusalem. It appears the elders were charged by Paul with leadership of the church without an evangelist.

Phil 1:1 – Paul mentions overseers and deacons, but not evangelists.

1 Tim 5:17 – elders "rule/direct the affairs" of the church – same word "lead/govern" from Rom 12:8; Same word used in 1 Tim 3:4-5 - elders must "manage" their own family well or they can't care for the church.

Titus 1:5 – similar to P&B in Acts 14:23, apparently after evangelizing Crete, Paul leaves Titus behind and tells him to appoint elders (not evangelists) in every town.

Paul did not leave Titus behind to lead the church there; Titus wasn't staying long (3:12). They left elders behind to lead these churches.

2. What do these scriptures teach us? Elders took responsibility for leadership of the churches after they were planted by the apostle/evangelist. These scriptures suggest perhaps most churches in the NT were started by apostle/evangelists, but then elders were appointed to lead the church and the church planter departed. What we are experiencing right now in Gwinnett is not unusual, but appears to be the experience of most of our brothers and sisters in the 1st Century. It's ok if we are led for a while by elders without an evangelist.

3. What kind of men are elders?

1 Tim 3:1-4 & Titus 1:6-9 – “Elder” - older men with roots in the church & community - men above reproach, respectable, not recent converts, able to teach. Family men whose families are worthy of imitation. Husband of one wife, manages his own household well, keeping his children submissive, believing children who are not wild and disobedient. Character qualifications – self-controlled, not a drunkard or violent, gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy, not arrogant or quick-tempered, hospitable, holy. *This is a very high standard.*

4. What is the job description of elders?

Act 20:17-35 Serve the Lord with humility & tears, not hesitate to declare anything helpful, teaching publicly and privately; pay careful attention to self and the flock, care for the church, overseers, protect from wolves & false teachers; alert, admonish everyone with tears, ministered to his own needs, worked hard, helped the weak.

1 Pet 5:1-5 – shepherd the flock; exercise oversight, willingly, not for gain but eagerly, not domineering, but being examples, clothed with humility.

John 10 – Jesus the good shepherd. The sheep listen and follow. He leads the way. Provides security, pasture and abundant life. Lays down his life. Protects against wolves. Knows his sheep.

Eze 34 – bad example of shepherd. selfish, taking advantage; not strengthening the weak, healing the sick, binding the injured or bringing back strays; ruling with force and harshness.

Questions?