

SERIES Operating the Church (part 1)
 SERMON **Teaching the Gospel Pastorally (Ephesians 4.7–16)**¹
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1. BEING HONEST ABOUT PASTORS

In 2017, pastor Eric Geiger listed five common misconceptions people have about church pastors:² (1) they mainly work on Sunday—to which it's often added: even then for only an hour or two; (2) they're detached from "the real world;" (3) they have an easy life; (4) they don't really struggle like everyone else; and (5) they have a "direct line to God." In some ways, this list shadows one from 2015, given by pastor Joe McKeever, who pointed out five realities about pastors that most church members aren't clear about or don't realize:³ (1) Pastors are called by God, they don't volunteer; (2) pastors overseers of the church, not hirelings; (3) pastors are accountable to God for the souls of the congregation; (4) pastors lead by serving, not by lording it over others; and (5) pastors serve to please God, not the congregation.

And to come at things from another direction, and rebutting a good chunk of the idea that pastors have an easy life or that they don't struggle,⁴ church consultant Matt Henslee posted 10 ridiculous things commonly said to pastors—often on a Sunday morning.⁵ I won't list all ten, but here's a revealing sample: "Don't forget: you're on the preacher. You're here to marry, bury, and preach, but not lead or make decisions." "I'm not talking about the Bible; I'm talking about the bylaws." (*I've heard that one...not here at Manor Woods. I've also heard: "There's too much Scripture in your sermons" and even, "We don't care if that's what you say Scripture teaches; this is how we've always done it and you can't change that." Both of those came from an "elder" in the church*). And because it relates to this morning: "We're already saved. We don't need to hear the gospel every time someone gets up in the pulpit."

According to a study conducted by Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research,⁶ that last claim runs into some big problems. The study reveals the true need for the true gospel to be central in the life of the church as well as a foundational component of the church's teaching ministry. Primarily because the gospel is what reveals who God is, what He's done in Christ, who we are because of what He's done, and the hope we have in this life and the life to come. But it's also because the true gospel is necessary for a right understanding of what it means to be God's church and to live lives that faithfully reflect His holiness, righteousness, and truth. This

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations will follow the New English Translation (NET).

² E. Geiger, "[5 Misconceptions About Pastors.](#)" blog post (Mar 16, 2017).

³ J. McKeever, "[Five Facts About Pastors Most Church Members are Unclear On.](#)" blog post (Mar 23, 2015).

⁴ These are ideas often formed in the absence of evidence. Just by way of example (from various survey-studies done): 97% of pastors have been betrayed, falsely accused, or hurt by someone in the church; 90% report working between 55 and 75 hours per week; 80% of pastors expect conflict within their church; 78% were forced to resign, either without cause or because of church conflict; 70% battle with depression; 70% do not have someone they consider to be a close friend; 57% are unable to pay their bills; 53% worry about future financial security; +50% feel afraid and/or ill-prepared to speak about (let alone confront) social issues—especially moral ones; 40% will have a serious conflict with a church member at least once a month; 38% are considering quitting the ministry completely; and 35% struggle with fears of inadequacy. Mix that with the constant reality (especially post-COVID) that: across America, every day 3500 people leave the church (sometimes tied to a lack of confidence in the church); 4000 new churches begin each year but 7000 will close in that same period; and that over 50% of pastors are over the age of 55, and there is little sign of a growing number of younger pastors entering vocational ministry—partly tied to Bible Colleges either dying or closing.

⁵ M. Henslee, "[10 Most Ridiculous Things Said to Pastors.](#)" Lifeway Research blog post (Nov 28, 2018).

⁶ I've included the findings of this study at the end of this document.

is what it means to “teach the gospel pastorally.” A teaching that cannot be solely facts and data about the NT and especially the truths of the gospel, but must show how those truths are meant to redefine who we are and how we live. And as we’ll see this morning: to a large extent, that’s what Paul’s letter to the Ephesians does. It’s a letter that provides us with rich insight on what the gospel is and how it is to be foundation to our identity, life, and mission.

— PRAY —

2. LIVING UNIFIED IN CHRIST

Ordinarily, biblical egg-heads say Eph 4 is a turning-point in Paul’s letter. It’s where he moves from the deeply theological section of chapters 1–3 to the more practical section of chapters 4–6.⁷ A move from the abstract to real-life application or relevance. While there are hiccups with that rather simplistic (*and overly tidy*) view of the letter,⁸ the basic idea within it is good. There is a need to move from theology to practice—showing how the great truths of Scripture affect, influence, and/or shape daily life. Thus, the truths of God’s Word cannot be details we simply keep in our heads. Those truths must be employed to bring about better ways of living—and not just as members of the church but also believers in the world.⁹ But notice the (quasi-)implied sequence and this necessity.

We must know God’s truth first before we can know why it’s relevant as well as how and where it should redefine who we are and how we live. Or as one commentator put it: “Christian conduct follows from Christian doctrine.”¹⁰ And before we start to think, “Hey, that’s pretty clever,” we need to realize: that observation (*or better: that truth*) is not original with that commentator. He boosted it from someone else. Or said nicer: he’s repackaging Paul’s opening claim in Eph 4.1: “I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live **worthily of the calling with which you have been called.**” The language for “to live worthily” (ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι) refers to the way of life (*or the manner of moral conduct*) that is not just “worthy” in the general sense of good and meaningful, but worthy because the life lived is faithfully consistent with (*or reflective of*) that which is truly good and meaningful.

And what is that worthy thing the believers are to reflect and live? As Paul says: “**the calling with which you have been called.**” We know from elsewhere in the NT that “calling” language refers to salvation—i.e., new life in Christ. A newness promised in the true gospel—the only one that declares the reality of (*and necessity for*) our new identity, mind and heart, lifestyle,

⁷ On this way of reading the letter, see e.g., M.G. Gutzke, *Plain Talk on Ephesians* (Lamplighter Books, 1973), 100; M. Barth, *Ephesians*, 2 vols. (Doubleday, 1974), 1:52, 2:426; F.F. Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1984), 240–41, 333; F. Foulkes, *Ephesians* (InterVarsity, 1989), 115; cf. P.T. O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1999), 2–3, 63–64. H.W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, 2002), 62, 499–500; S.M. Baugh, *Ephesians* (Lexham Press, 2016), 38, 288. And then there’s the more recent definitive claim by D.L. Bock: “The second half of Ephesians is **all about** application” (*Ephesians* [InterVarsity, 2019], 115—emphasis added). To Bock I would kindly say: check out the next two footnotes.

⁸ Chief of which being: the proposed divisions are not as clean and exact as the proposal suggests (or wants). There is an ongoing blend of theology and application throughout the letter. As a patient reading of the text will show: in Paul’s “theological” teaching of Eph 1–3, there are crucial points of practical application for the believers; and in his “practical” teaching of Eph 4–6, there are constant references to theological truths. This is recognized by O’Brien (*Ephesians*, 66, 272), who assumes that the overlap is apparent from his arguments leading up to Eph 4; cf. S.E. Fowl, who offers an explicit example of the blend found with Eph 3 and 4—see *Ephesians* (Westminster John Knox, 2012), 126–27; and Hoehner, who gives a broader sweep (*Ephesians*, 62–64).

⁹ Or to borrow from Hoehner, who puts a finer point on it: “All knowledge has two components: pure and applied. It is important to embrace both components, for the exclusion of one becomes an exercise in futility.... Thus, in theology, head knowledge alone will make little difference in individual or corporate lives, and practice without theological knowledge has the potential to lead to heretical practice” (*Ephesians*, 499).

¹⁰ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 116.

and hope because of the redeeming work of Christ. In fact, Paul remains faithful to this truth in the opening of his letter to the Ephesians. To the reality that believers belong to God because of faith in Christ, Paul makes this clear connection: “**And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)—when you believed in Christ—you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory**” (Eph 1.13–14).

That’s some wonderful trinitarian theology for us, but we can’t let it keep us from seeing the rather practical truth being revealed. Gospel-preaching, faithful allegiance, reality of salvation, identity with Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit (*which brings about holy living*), redeemed to God as His own, and filled with hopeful assurance. But Paul doesn’t stop there. After voicing his unceasing prayers to God because of the faithfulness of the Ephesians, Paul says: “**I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation¹¹ in your growing knowledge of Him—since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened¹²—so that you may know what is the hope of His calling,¹³ what is the wealth of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the incomparable greatness of His power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of His immense strength**” (1.17–19).

Again with trinitarian theology, but this too carries a practical expectation. Contrary to popular belief (*even in some churches today*): Christian life doesn’t end at initial faith, confession, repentance, and baptism. That’s where it begins. There’s an expectation of maturity in faithful allegiance and obedience to Christ after that beginning. A maturity that involves a “**growing knowledge of Him.**” This is not just a facts-and-details knowledge of Jesus. That’s vital and necessary, because the wrong facts and details lead to the wrong Christ, and the wrong Christ cannot save. But the maturity that involves a “**growing knowledge of Him**” is one that faithfully and constantly pursues a personal-relationship knowledge of Jesus. He’s not merely someone we know about or recognize (*when it’s convenient*). Instead, He is one we know and remain with at all times in life. For we know that without Him, we are lost and without hope.

Thus, for those who belong to God in Christ, and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, there is the expectation of growing (*and deepening*) our knowledge of and relationship with Christ. For it is in that knowledge and relationship that we—with the God-given blessing of the Holy Spirit’s work, in communion with the authoritative revelation of God’s Word—will know what it means to belong to Him and to live the new life He provides. And it’s from the deepening and maturing knowledge of that identity and expectation that we will be able “**to live worthily of the calling with which [we] have been called.**” A faithful consistency and reflectiveness that, as Paul goes on to say, reveals itself among believers “**with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**” (4.2–3, ESV).¹⁴ Notice the double-emphasis on the unity and the bond we have—with the term, “bond” (σύνδεσμος) meaning: what necessarily holds things in place or together.

¹¹ The phrase, δόνη ὑμῖν πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως, is better rendered as, “**may give to you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation**”—i.e., the Spirit who is the source of wisdom and revelation (cf. 1 Cor 2.6–12).

¹² The phrase, “**have been enlightened**” comes from the plural perfect passive participle, πεφωτισμένους, which can also be translated as: “**have been brought into the light**” (cf. John 1.1–14 imagery of Christ as the light, especially in relation to salvation).

¹³ κλήσις, which is the same word Paul uses in Eph 4.1.

¹⁴ For “**bearing with,**” the NET offers the rendering “**putting up with,**” but this is not only a bit on the nose but also gives a summons that stands at odds with how Paul usually speaks on this. The term he uses is ἀνέχομαι, which elsewhere means: “sustain,” “endure,” “hold up,” “bear with,” and in some cases “patient with.”

To come at this backwards: The bond is one “of peace.” Not ours or created by us, but God’s and created by Him alone. The only peace that establishes our peace with Him and with each other as His redeemed people. As Paul voices in Eph 2: “For He [Christ] is our peace, the One who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one” (2.14); and “He did this to create in Himself one new man [i.e., one new people] out of two, thus making peace, and to reconcile them both in one body through the cross” (2.15b–16a). To do this: “He came and preached peace to you who were far off [i.e., Gentiles] and peace to those who were near, [i.e., Jews] so that that through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (2.17–18). And it’s that bond of peace that exists in and sustains the unified body of Christ. A unity that’s not ours or created by us, but God’s and created by Him alone.

A unity that defines our new identity, new life, and new family status with each other in God’s eternal household because of who Christ is and all that He’s done to make it a reality. And it’s a unity that’s guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. So, Paul can end Eph 2 by declaring: “So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. In Him the whole building,¹⁵ being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together¹⁶ into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (2.19–22). And because, as said in 1 Cor 3.16, we “are God’s Temple and that God’s Spirit lives in” us, thus making us holy; not only does the Spirit’s holy, indwelling presence declare what we are and to whom we truly belong.

That presence also defines how we are to live our lives before God and with each other. Lives that are worthy of the calling to be not only new, holy creations in Christ, but also to be truly unified in true peace. And our unity and peace with each other is the result of our unity and peace with God. Who we are in life is to reflect who we are in Christ. And who we are in Christ is to defined by Him alone. As Paul celebrates in Gal 3: “For in Christ you are all [children] of God through faith” —i.e., now, just to be clear: contrary to popular opinion or even official pronouncements from national leaders or mouthpieces, a person is not “a child of God” by virtue of being born. As Scripture declares: the right to be called a “child of God” is only for those who truly believe in who Christ truly is and have been reborn (cf. Jn 1.12; 3.3–8).

Back to Galatians: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for all of you are one in Christ” (Gal 3.26–28). Once more: unity and peace with each other because of our unity and peace with God. Thus, as Paul says in Eph 4: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all” (4.4–6). Therefore, all of life is to be lived for God because all of life has been given by Him. And while that is true for individual believers, it is especially so for the church who is committed to faithfully living worthily of the calling to its new identity, heart, and lifestyle.

¹⁵ οἰκοδομή, which will come again later in what Paul says in Eph 4, when he stresses the result of gospel preaching.

¹⁶ The phrase, “are being built together” comes from the present passive verb, συνοικοδομεῖσθε—a term only found here in the entire NT. And be sure to notice its “passive” voice—i.e., the one doing the building is not the building itself (the church) but the builder (the triune God).

3. FAITHFUL UNITY IN A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

All of that leads Paul to where he needs to go next, and that is to a twofold reality. On the one hand: while unity in salvation is defined by uniformity in belief, founded upon the one true gospel about the one true Savior; unity in the body of Christ does not mean uniformity in membership. Meaning: salvation and life in the church is not only for one race or ethnicity, one gender over the (*only*) other one, or one status that gets privileged and another doesn't—that's the way the world thinks and operates, especially the world in its rejection of God and His design for true life. Instead, the church is called to celebrate its redemptive unity in the beauty of its communal diversity. (*That's the essential point of Gal 3.26–28, and even v.29*).

But on the other hand, and more to the point (*and we'll deal with more of this in a couple of weeks when we look at 1 Cor 12*): while there is redemptive unity in the one true Lord, faith, baptism, and God of all things; unity in the body of Christ does not mean uniformity in service or ministry. Meaning: not everyone in the church will be equipped to serve in the exact same way or in the exact same ministry. (*By way of analogy: think what would happen if an entire football team were made up of only quarterbacks, centers, or wide receivers*). Here, too, there is the need to celebrate the beauty of communal diversity in its unified service to God. Thus, as Paul reveals in v.7: “**But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.**” Notice the giver (Christ) and the recipient (believers). Also notice Who defines the standard of measure (Christ), not to mention why something is given at all (grace).

We'll come back to that shortly. For now, it should be pointed out that the term used for “gift” (δωρεά) elsewhere refers to God's blessing of salvation,¹⁷ Christ as the Savior,¹⁸ or even the Holy Spirit as the seal of our redemption.¹⁹ But here in Ephesians, Paul uses it to refer to something else—though not disconnected from God's gracious blessing of salvation. Here, while Paul uses the specific term, δωρεά, it's meaning is closer to what he says in 1 Cor 12, where he speaks emphatically about distinct “**grace-gifts**” (χαρισμάτων) “**but the same Spirit;**” distinct “**ministries**” (διακονιῶν) “**but the same Lord;**” and while these bring about distinct “**results**” (ἐνεργημάτων), it's “**the same God who produces [ἐνεργῶν] all of them in everyone**” (1 Cor 12.4–5). Once more: trinitarian theology defining life in the community of believers.

And it's this distinctive gracious gifting that Paul has in mind in Eph 4, where believers are to celebrate the diverse ways Christ blesses His church to do His kingdom ministry. In fact, in Eph 3, Paul identifies his own gifting for that ministry. After explaining the “mystery” of the gospel, which reveals and declares the fulfillment of God's covenant plan to unite Jews and Gentiles as one redeemed people, Paul says: “**I became a servant [= διάκονος, minister] of this gospel according to the gift [= δωρεά] of God's grace that was given to me by the exercise [= ἐνέργεια] of His power**” (3.7). There it is again: a clear breakdown of the giver, the recipient, the definer, and the reasons why (cf. Eph 1.19–20). And as we see in Eph 4: it's the same God who gifted Paul with his ministry that gifts others in the church to fulfill theirs. And because God—or as Paul explicitly reveals it in vv.8–10: Christ (*who is God*)—is the giver of the gifts,²⁰ He defines not only what they are but also their proper function and purpose.

¹⁷ Romans 5.15, 17; 2 Corinthians 9.15; Hebrews 6.4.

¹⁸ John 4.10.

¹⁹ Acts 2.38; 10.45; 11.17; cf. 8.20.

²⁰ In a way that continues to confuse scholars but one that must remain faithful to the truth that the biblical writers were under the authoritative inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul quotes Psalm 68.18 to support the claim about Christ being the giver of the gifts. In doing this: Paul is necessarily identifying Christ as God, since, in Ps 68 it is God (אֱלֹהִים, *ēlōhîm*) who is the focus of the passage.

And because Christ is the giver and definer of the gifts, those who receive them must exercise them in accordance with their Christ-determined function and purpose. And it's from a proper understanding of what Scripture reveals that we discover two overlapping truths about these gifts. First and foremost, the gifts are for honoring God alone and serving His eternal kingdom in His name for His glory alone. To put it bluntly: what we do with His gifts must always be about Him and never about us. And that brings us to the second truth: the gifts that God gives to His church are the people He equips and empowers for faithful service. A faithful service that is carried out in humility, submission, and obedience to the only One who is worthy and who alone sits on the throne over all things. So, the overlap reveals the necessity of prioritizing Christ-defined character over general abilities or even apparent giftedness.

We saw this last week with the roles of elders and deacons, where the primary focus dealt with who the person is because of their life in Christ rather than what the person might be talented or capable enough to do or perform. For it is possible for someone to be appointed to various tasks in the church (*things that, when being done or fulfilled, make that person think they're worthy of some title or "office"*), and it's possible for that person to do the tasks quite well. But the problem is: while they can do that, they're morally bankrupt. Being Christ-like, gospel-focused, and Spirit-defined is not concern. The name they can make for themselves in what they do is more important than the One in whose name they are meant to be remade and for whom they are to live and serve. And news stories abound with examples of elders, deacons, and pastors falling into disrepute because of scandals that reflect this bankruptcy.

And while the individual scandals are different (*in substance and form*), they often share the same cause: self before God (*or self-idolatry*). At the very least, this means: self-truth instead of God's truth. Self-interest instead of God's will. Self-identity instead of God's design. Self-defined morality instead of God's holiness. And self-glory instead of God's glory. And when the self is held to be greater than God, then the self will use what God gives to uphold and legitimize self's self-given greatness. We certainly see this play out in the individual lives of those who claim Christ but recreate Him in their own image, and we're seeing the same thing (*more and more*) in the life of the church. Where the church is for the self rather than God, and where the church is meant to serve the self rather than the self serving God with the church.

A state of being not helped by the rise and encouragement of self-made and exalted-by-others celebrity leaders or pastors. (*A problem that's not new to our time; it's found in the church at Corinth, and Paul calls it what it is: sinful and destructive to the body of Christ*). We need to realize: the church—the people who belong to God and are to reflect Him alone in a worthy manner—does not need such self-interested and self-idolatrous people, especially in leadership. In fact, in Eph 5, Paul declares this about such people: (*a truth that many in our culture today would find uncomfortable; but personal feelings do not invalidate God's truth*): **“For you can be confident of this one thing: that no person who is immoral, impure, or greedy (such a person is an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (5.5).** They have no inheritance because they do not truly belong to God in Christ, evidenced by their rejection of Him along with the redeemed identity and life He graciously provides.

Instead, the church—according to God and His design for the church—needs self-giving and co-laboring servants whose identity and lives are defined by God's truth, His will, His design, His holiness, and all of it being done for His glory alone. And here, to reveal what that looks

like, Paul identifies four gifts—or four key self-giving and co-laboring servants—that Christ gives to His church to help it fulfill its calling. These are the ones who are entrusted to lead those who belong to Christ. And it’s to such gifts that we now give our attention. Look with me at v.11, where Paul lists the four. We’ll come back to the specific reason why (*or for what purpose and how*) in vv.12–13. Paul begins by saying about Christ: “**He Himself gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers**” (4.11).

First, there are apostles (= ἀπόστολος). As is often pointed out: they are listed first because they are first both in time and priority.²¹ Now, “apostle” needs to be understood in the biblical sense of the term, not the modern and easily appropriated one. Generally speaking, while the term “apostle” means something like an ambassador or official representative; its NT usage nearly always carries a more specific meaning. Apostles are faithful disciples who were Christ-chosen and appointed to be the authoritative heralds of the truth concerning the identity, nature, and mission of Christ as the true Messiah, Savior, and Lord. More to the point: they were the eye-witnesses of who Christ is and what He did through His life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus, they are the ones who truly and personally know what the gospel is and declares. They are first-hand living testimony, and they were called to proclaim the gospel (*and establish churches*) from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Second, there are prophets (= προφήτης). Like “apostles,” this needs to be understood in the biblical sense and not the easily commandeered one for modern usage. Prophets in the NT, like their OT counterparts, spoke boldly God’s truth, called for repentance when life did not conform to God’s truth and righteousness, and declared the assurance one has when life is lived according to that truth and righteousness. And notice the essential standard that is non-negotiable: God’s truth, as revealed in His Word—both written and incarnate. The standard that is the authority from which the prophet speaks and by which the prophets are measured. Thus, the one who speaks from and upholds God’s Word is a true prophet; whereas the one who speaks other than and distorts God’s Word is a false prophet. Hence the necessity for discernment in the body of Christ—or as John says: there is always the need to test the spirits, for not all who claim to speak for God are truly from God (see 1Jn 4.1–3).

Third, there are evangelists (= εὐαγγελιστής). This role, by and large, has retained its biblical meaning and even continues to reflect the biblical heads-up of being despised by the world. Even today, the terms “evangelist” and “evangelical” have come to be used to paint someone or something as evil. Cheap-shots aside, this term comes from the verb, εὐαγγελίζω, which means “declare the good news” or “the gospel.” Now, for what it’s worth: εὐαγγελιστής only appears three times in the entire NT—once here in Eph 4 (*obviously*), and the other two helping define its usage and meaning as it relates to the life of the church (*or as a gift for the church*). In Acts 21.8, Philip is identified as an evangelist (*...and he’s also known for having four daughters who were prophetesses in their local church community—see 21.9*). And we know from Acts what his evangelistic ministry looked like. It was quite mobile.

Then in 2 Tim 4.5, Paul instructs Timothy to “**do the work of an evangelist**” and to do so at all times in all places, even in the face of adversity, but to engage in that ministry with a heart that is self-controlled and ready to endure all things. Thus, the ministry of proclaiming the true

²¹ See e.g., Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 125; cf. C. Hodge, *Ephesians* (Crossway Books, 1994), 135.

gospel (*wherever one serves*) is not only upholding a message that is other-than any and all false gospel messages in and around the church, but also becoming the target of criticism, shame, and rejection by an unbelieving world. A world that does not want the true gospel because that gospel exposes the world's true nature and status before God. (*Nothing new under the sun*). And while Timothy's ministry was confined to the church in Ephesus for a time, the ministry of evangelism in other places for other people was a constant in his life.

When we take these two passages together, we see that the meaning of εὐαγγελιστής (*along with its function*) is not only a gospel-proclaimer...who will walk 500 miles just to make sure people have the chance to hear and know the message of God's salvation in Christ. This means: the evangelist is also one who is from the church but does gospel-ministry outside of the church. Thus, we could say they are more of an itinerate preacher (*like Billy Graham*). But we also need to say this, by way of reminder. While they are often itinerate and serve outside of the local church, evangelists do not fulfill their ministry in their own name or for their own purposes. Wherever they go to reach the unbelieving: they uphold the truth of gospel (*as authoritatively revealed and declared by the apostles*), they exalt the name of Christ, and they serve others to glorify God and His sovereign reign over all things.

That brings us to the last gift Paul mentions: those who are pastors and teachers (= ποιμήν and διδάσκαλος). Just for clarity: older translations or traditional readings separate these terms into two different roles or people. However, the way the language works, it's better to see them as combined—i.e., pastor-teacher. In today's language, we would equate this with the "senior pastor." Now, the term for "pastor" is ποιμήν, which can also be translated as "shepherd." And in the context of God's people, and borrowing from similar OT imagery, this is one charged with guiding and caring for God's people—especially in their knowledge of God and His truth (*via teaching*) as well as how that knowledge is to shape their lives as God's people. Thus, we're not surprised to find the imagery of "pastor" or "shepherd" used for the priestly leaders of Israel. But there is a crucial difference when it's used in the NT.

In the OT, the priests were, by and large, modeled after specifically chosen individuals from within God's people (*e.g., Aaron, Zadok*) and were expected to fulfill the role in the way the reflects what God required of such individuals. And the same was true when "shepherd" referred to kings or rulers of God's people. This means, priests and kings modeled humans. And as God clearly warned His people: humans are prone to faults, imperfections, failures, and even corruption, and these failures in the shepherds will bring about danger for and even loss to the flock. And we see that very result play out in the Bible many times—not just among the priests in particular, but also among other rulers, leaders, or elders who were tasked to be the faithful shepherds (*or pastors*) of God's people, and do so in a way worthy of their calling.

But as we see in passages like Jer 2 and 10, that worthiness was lacking. The shepherds had turned their backs on God (cf. 2.5–9), they had given into the temptation around them and fallen into idolatry (cf. 10.8–14), and had sealed their rejection of God and His revealed truth (cf. 10.21). Decisions that condemn them before a holy and righteous God as well as scatter the flock of God's people—not only leaving the flock leaderless but also without defense from the dangers of worldly false teachings and sinful lifestyles. (*Although, it should be said: there are those among the people who knowingly and willingly followed the lead and lifestyle of the fallen shepherds; only a remnant remained faithful to God alone, despite what happened to*

them when their leader failed). Thus, it's no surprise to read a passage like Ezek 34, where God rightly speaks His judgment upon the shepherds and the sheep who willingly follow.

The shepherds are cursed for their self-interest, authoritarian rule, desire for personal gain, failure to tend to the needs of others or to ease their suffering (*especially those within God's people*), and their abandonment of God's truth—not only as the true foundation for wise instruction but also the true standard by which holy and righteous living is defined. And when that true standard and true foundation are lost and compromised (*especially among those called to faithfully teach and sustain it*), God's morality and truth are shown the door so that sinful passion and personal-truth can party like it's 1999. And while corrupt shepherds might feel they can get away with all of this—because God's no longer in the house, so He can't see what's happening or say anything about it—God knows and sees all things, and will speak against both that which is unholy, unrighteous, and untrue in His sight and those who declare such things to be good, worthy, and a blessing for God's people. (*James wasn't kidding when he said: many should not become teachers, because they are judged more strictly [see 3.1]*).

However, in the midst of this word of judgment, we cannot fail to see the word of promised blessing. In Jer 50, God says He will be the one to rescue the scattered flock, restore them, and serve as their shepherd (see 50.17–20). And in Ezek 34, the picture is similarly gracious (see 34.12–22): God promises to be the one who searches for His sheep (*those who belong to Him*). He will be the one who frees them from captivity and brings them back to His pasture. And He will be the one who feeds, provides, tends to, heals, and protects His sheep without fail. And in the midst of this promise, there is a word of prophecy for how all of this will be fulfilled (see 34.23–24). It will be fulfilled personally in the One who is the true shepherd. The only One who will be the worthy leader, provider, and redeemer of God's flock. The only One who can legitimately be called the Good Shepherd.²² And as seen elsewhere in Scripture, the only One against whom all other shepherds are measured and held accountable.

Thus, in the NT, shepherds are not to be modeled after other human shepherds. Instead, they must be image-bearers of that one true, Good Shepherd: Jesus Christ—the One in whom there is no fault, imperfection, failure, or corruption. And while His shepherds (*or pastors*) of God's people will never reach that ideal; they must strive to reflect that higher standard in who they are and how they live as pastors in God's church and as faithful disciples in the world. Once again: Christ-defined character is essential, not personal abilities. And as Christ Himself declared when comparing the difference between how the world does things and how faithful disciples are to conduct themselves: “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. But it is not this way among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,²³ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all.²⁴”

²² To be perfectly clear: “Good Shepherd” is not an identity (or title) that others give to the One who is worthy. Instead, it is an identity (or title) that the One who is worthy reveals about Himself—i.e., it's who He truly is (see Jn 10.1–18, esp. vv.10, 14).

²³ The phrase in v.43, ὃς ἂν θέλῃ μέγας γενέσθαι ἐν ὑμῖν, ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος, (“whoever intends to become **great** among you, he himself will be your **servant**”—my translation, emphasis added) stresses the idea of status, with the gospel reversing how that status is defined. In the Graeco-Roman world, greatness would not be illustrated by a servant, for servants are far below the greatness of those who are prominent in society.

²⁴ Similar to the preceding verse, the phrase in v.44, ὃς ἂν θέλῃ ὑμῶν γενέσθαι πρῶτος, ἔσται πάντων δοῦλος, (“whoever intends to become **first** among you, he himself will be a **slave** of all”—my translation, emphasis added) stresses the idea of rank, with the gospel reversing how that rank is defined. In the Graeco-Roman world, that which is first in honor or position would not be illustrated by a slave, for slaves are far below everything that would otherwise classify them as first of anything.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10.42–45).

This is the life of humble, self-giving service to be lived by the shepherd (*or pastor*), a life that is itself to be a reflection of the heart recreated by and modeled after the Good Shepherd. A way of compassionate servant-leading that reveals itself through the commitment to care for, guide, nurture, protect, and strengthen the flock of God’s people. (*Thus, confirmed by other NT passages, and unlike the other gifts or roles that Christ provides for the church: the pastor is charged with being the primary servant-leader of the local congregation of God’s people in an ongoing manner*). And while there are a multitude of practical ways this sort of servant-leadership unfolds in the church, there is one area that is non-negotiable, and it’s found in the second half of the description of this role: “teacher.”

Thus, the pastor is charged with instructing God’s people in God’s truth as revealed in His Word—both written and incarnate. For without such instruction, the church will lack the nourishment God intended it to have for healthy life and ministry. A nourishment that allows the church—as a unified body—to grow and flourish by His strength and in accordance with His design. More to the point: without instruction in God’s truth, the church will be left insufficiently equipped to stand firm and guard itself against false teaching, destructive philosophies or ideologies, as well as criticism, shame, oppression, and persecution. And without God’s truth being central to who God’s people are, they will easily (*and quickly*) surrender the truth for a lie—especially when the lie promises to make them who they can never truly become: the center of all things.

But with God’s truth being central to who God’s people are recreated and called to be, we will not only know who we truly are (*i.e., “children of God”*) but also able to stand firm against the constant onslaught of falsehood. And we can stand firm remain steadfast in the unassailable truth that it is God alone who is the center of all things, that His sovereign lordship over all things will never end, and that He provides for His people in all things without fail.

4. TEACHING THE GOSPEL PASTORALLY

That truth of the gospel is what pastors are called to teach God’s people and upon which they are to guide God’s people in how to live Christ-like, gospel-focused, and Spirit-led lives. A pastoral teaching that reveals the way of life God expects of His faithful children. A life that faithfully reflects and is worthily fulfills the calling we have in Christ, founded on God’s truth, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. And we know all of this (*and so much more*) to be the case by how Paul closes his gospel-based instruction on who church is, how Christ has provided for it, and how it must live in His unity and peace—especially in the midst of a world that lacks both. Thus, when providing the reason for Christ’s provision and what the apostles, prophets, and evangelists in general, and pastor-teachers in particular must do, Paul says: they are...

“to equip the saints for the work of ministry,²⁵ that is, to build up²⁶ the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature. So we are no longer to

²⁵ διακονία, the same term that’s been used for so much of Paul’s teaching on service in God’s kingdom on earth.

²⁶ οἰκοδομῆν, the same term used in Eph 2.21.

be children,²⁷ tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes. But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From Him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body builds itself up in love” (Eph 4.12–16).

Notice the understood foundation for the equipping, building up, maturity, defense, and way of living: God’s revelation, His truth, His Word—both written and incarnate. Notice who is to remain faithfully obedient to and upholding of that truth—not just in their minds and hearts but in their daily lives: all believers. And notice what happens when God’s truth is faithfully lived by His people: there is love, unity, growth (or maturity), and peace. And when there is a faithful life of love, unity, growth (or maturity), and peace in the church, there is a church that is walking “**worthily of the calling with which [it has] been called.**” A worthy life that faithfully reflect His holiness, righteousness, and truth. A faithful reflection who God is, what He’s done in Christ, who we are because of what He’s done, and the hope we have in this life and the life to come. A hope founded upon the truth of the gospel that’s been taught pastorally and expressed in our daily life, which is committed to living the gospel pastorally. Let us be the faithful church that is committed to that identity, life, and mission for the glory of God alone.

²⁷ The phrase here, ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν **νήπιοι**, is better rendered as, “so that we might no longer be **infants**” (my translation, emphasis added). And based on how “infant” is used elsewhere in the NT, Paul’s referring to levels of maturity in faith. Thus, Paul is calling for a decisive move out of infantile faith, which is easily tossed around and snatch away by false teaching.

2022 State of Theology
Ligonier Ministries & LifeWay Research²⁸

*US Adults: 3011 surveyed

*US Evangelicals: 711 of the 3011 surveyed

1. God is a perfect being and cannot make a mistake.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	15%	10%	9%	15%	51%
US Evang.	1%	1%	1%	2%	95%

2. There is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	15%	5%	11%	16%	54%
US Evang.	0%	2%	1%	1%	96%

3. God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	16%	6%	11%	22%	45%
US Evang.	32%	6%	6%	10%	46%

4. God learns and adapts to different circumstances.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	23%	8%	17%	20%	32%
US Evang.	39%	4%	9%	5%	43%

5. Biblical accounts of the physical (bodily) resurrection of Jesus are completely accurate. This event actually occurred.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	15%	8%	11%	19%	47%
US Evang.	0%	0%	1%	4%	95%

6. Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	24%	8%	13%	15%	40%
US Evang.	18%	4%	5%	3%	70%

7. Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	27%	9%	11%	22%	31%
US Evang.	50%	4%	3%	5%	38%

8. God created male and female.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	12%	3%	7%	14%	64%
US Evang.	0%	0%	1%	1%	98%

9. The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	19%	7%	15%	26%	33%
US Evang.	30%	3%	7%	9%	51%

²⁸ Two things must be kept in mind. First, as noted: the study is based on the answers of 3,011 US adults, which would be considered a rather low Sunday at Southeast Christian Church (Louisville, KY), and of that figure, 711 are evangelicals. So, the percentages reflect that sample and **not** the entirety of Christians in America. Second, both Ligonier (especially) and LifeWay (to a lesser extent) are Reformed in their theological commitments. This is revealed in the specificity of some of the questions (and the unspoken presuppositions within them)—e.g., 15, 19, 34, 35. For more in-depth discussion on the findings, [read this](#).

10. The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual new birth or new life before a person has faith in Jesus Christ.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	20%	9%	21%	23%	27%
US Evang.	24%	3%	10%	8%	55%

11. The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something which is forbidden in the Bible.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	51%	11%	16%	11%	11%
US Evang.	66%	3%	4%	2%	25%

12. Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	14%	14%	6%	39%	27%
US Evang.	28%	11%	4%	21%	36%

13. Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	58%	11%	6%	10%	15%
US Evang.	33%	6%	6%	7%	48%

14. God counts a person as righteous not because of one's works but only because of one's faith in Jesus Christ.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	20%	13%	10%	23%	34%
US Evang.	3%	2%	2%	10%	83%

15. Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	16%	5%	9%	17%	53%
US Evang.	28%	4%	3%	4%	61%

16. The Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	27%	14%	6%	28%	25%
US Evang.	64%	7%	3%	3%	23%

17. The Bible is 100% accurate in all that it teaches.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	29%	15%	5%	18%	33%
US Evang.	1%	2%	2%	7%	88%

18. Modern science disproves the Bible.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	31%	17%	12%	21%	19%
US Evang.	57%	6%	7%	7%	23%

19. God chose the people he would save before he created the world.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	39%	13%	18%	13%	17%
US Evang.	31%	6%	12%	8%	43%

20. Hell is a real place where certain people will be punished forever.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	21%	8%	12%	20%	39%
US Evang.	3%	1%	2%	5%	89%

21. There will be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all the people who have lived.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	18%	8%	10%	19%	45%
US Evang.	1%	0%	1%	3%	95%

22. Worshiping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	10%	14%	9%	32%	35%
US Evang.	23%	18%	5%	15%	39%

23. Christians should be silent on issues of politics.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	40%	21%	9%	13%	17%
US Evang.	50%	13%	7%	5%	25%

24. Every Christian has an obligation to join a local church.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	36%	19%	8%	19%	18%
US Evang.	15%	11%	6%	19%	49%

25. Sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	29%	13%	5%	20%	33%
US Evang.	2%	2%	2%	10%	84%

26. Abortion is a sin.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	27%	12%	8%	19%	34%
US Evang.	2%	2%	4%	10%	82%

27. Gender identity is a matter of choice.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	38%	13%	7%	18%	24%
US Evang.	54%	5%	4%	5%	32%

28. The Bible's condemnation of homosexuality behavior doesn't apply today.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	30%	12%	12%	16%	30%
US Evang.	62%	5%	5%	5%	23%

29. God is unconcerned with my day-to-day decisions.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	40%	18%	10%	14%	18%
US Evang.	71%	5%	1%	3%	20%

30. The Bible has the authority to tell us what we must do.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	29%	14%	5%	23%	29%
US Evang.	3%	1%	2%	9%	85%

31. Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	19%	13%	8%	29%	31%
US Evang.	47%	9%	7%	9%	28%

32. The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	23%	15%	0%	24%	38%
US Evang.	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%

33. It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	27%	17%	0%	24%	32%
US Evang.	0%	1%	0%	0%	99%

34. Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	21%	15%	0%	22%	42%
US Evang.	0%	1%	0%	0%	99%

35. Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.					
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
US Adult	24%	16%	0%	23%	37%
US Evang.	1%	0%	0%	0%	99%