

# The Founders Journal



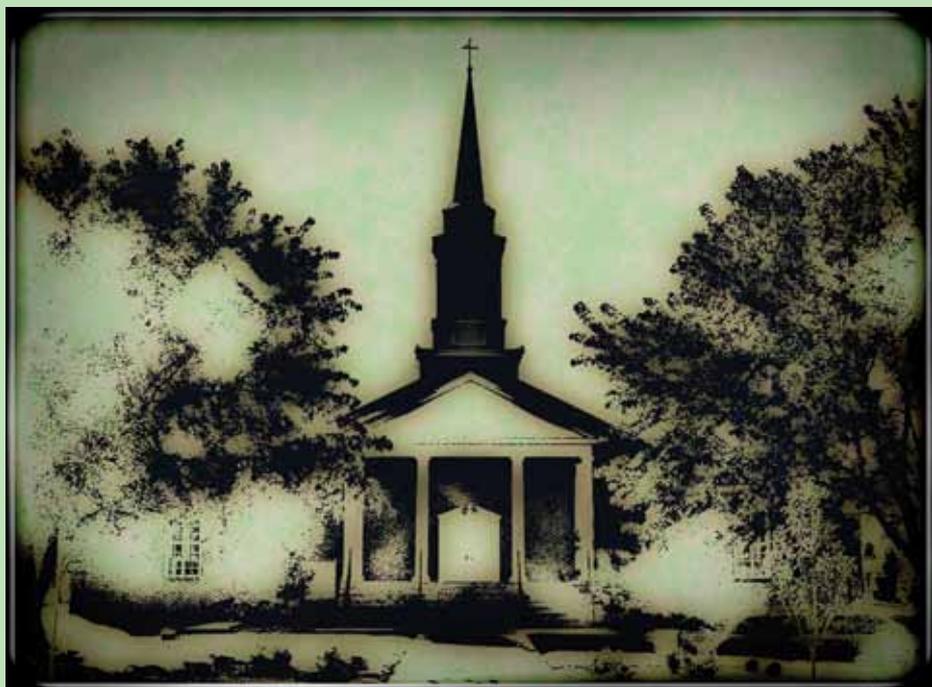
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**Ministry and Discipleship  
In the Household of God**

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# The Founders Journal



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# The Household of God: *An Introduction to the Church*

*Steven B. Cowan*

“I don’t need organized religion. I can worship God my own way in the privacy of my own home.”

“I do not belong to a *local* church, but I belong to the *universal* church made up of all who believe in Jesus.”

“Can’t I just think of my little home Bible study group as my church? Why do I have to join a formal organization to please God?”

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard these kinds of statements from professing Christians. Many religious people today seem to have little regard for the “traditional” local church, for what is often called “organized religion.” There are perhaps many reasons for this. For one thing, churches do not always care for their members as they should. Hurting, spiritually-needy people sometimes fall through the cracks and are neglected by the church leaders and other members. Little wonder then that people who have been “burned” by churches would want nothing to do with “organized religion.” For another thing, people in our relativistic, self-centered culture simply do not want the accountability that comes from membership in a local church. Add to this the fact that churches have done a poor job in recent generations of educating their members on the nature and importance of the local church—even denying at times that the Bible teaches formal church membership—and people outside the church have all the excuse they need to stay away.

Yet the Bible speaks much about the church. It tells us that Christ established and is in the process of building the church (Matthew 16:18); that He loves the church and died for her (Ephesians 5:25). It is Christ’s very Body on earth (Ephesians 4:15–16; 1 Corinthians 12:27), and His beloved bride (Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 21:2). The church is also described as the temple of God built with “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5). And, as the Apostle Paul aptly put it, the church is the *Household of God* (1 Timothy 3:15). A “household” is a family understood as an organized unit with structure, lines of authority, and particular functions. And because the church, as *God’s* household, is also the “pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), Paul goes to great pains to instruct Timothy (and us) concerning “how to conduct ourselves.”

As we will see, the Bible *does* teach that Christians should join themselves to God’s household, to organized, local churches. For this reason, it is crucial that those who name the name of Jesus understand what the church is and what our

relationship to the church should be. In this article, we will outline the nature of the church under five theses and explain why you should care about being a part of a local church.

## Thesis One: The Church Is a Gathered Community

Though the Bible does speak of a *universal church* that is composed of all Christian believers everywhere, and which is invisible (see Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23–32; Hebrews 12:22–23), the Bible is very clear that this universal church is to have concrete expression in particular places by Christians gathering together to form *local churches*, local communities of believers. This is proven, first of all, simply from the word “church” itself. This term comes from the Greek *ekklesia*, which means “assembly” or “congregation.” So, a church is an assembly or gathering together of people.

But, we can say more. In Acts 2, after Peter’s famous Pentecost sermon, we are told that 3000 people converted to faith in Christ. In verse 42, we learn that these new converts “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to *the fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Notice that one of the several activities that these early disciples is said to have devoted themselves was “fellowship.” This term comes from the Greek *koinonia*, which has to do with people joining together for mutual benefit; having a shared life together as we see later in Acts 4 and 5.

So a church is more than simply a meeting; more than a loose and casual gathering as when people get together for a party or at City Hall to vote on business. No, a church is a congregation of people who have a shared life together, a fellowship. The church is a *community*.

One of the most wonderful images of the church in the New Testament is the image of the “Body of Christ.” This image makes it plain that the church is an intimate fellowship that exists for the mutual benefit of all church members. The Apostle Paul describes the church in 1 Corinthians 12:4–27 using the image of the Body of Christ.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ... Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they

were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Among other things, this passage clearly teaches at least three important truths about the members of the Body of Christ:

- (1) Each Christian is given spiritual gifts for the mutual benefit of the whole church (v.7).
- (2) The church needs each gifted member (vv.15–18).
- (3) Each gifted member needs the whole church (v. 21).

What may we conclude from this? For one thing, we must say that the Body of Christ is healthy in so far as each member contributes his spiritual gifts for the good of all the other members. For another, since the church is a gathered community, there is the clear implication that each member of the church ought to have a *commitment* to the church. If a person exists in this kind of intimate fellowship in which he faithfully shares his gifts with the others, and they share with him, then that must involve a mutual commitment of each member to all the other members. We call this kind of commitment a *covenant*. For the church to be a gathered community, functioning as a healthy Body of Christ, requires that those who are gathered together enter into covenant with one another.

### **Thesis Two: The Church Is Comprised of Baptized Believers**

After His glorious resurrection, the Lord Jesus issued His Great Commission to His disciples with these words:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19–20).

This text tells us that the church is supposed to do four things:

- (1) Go
- (2) Make disciples
- (3) Baptize those disciples
- (4) Teach those disciples

For our purposes in this chapter, we will focus on item (3), *baptism*.

We are told by the Lord Jesus that the church is to make disciples and that the church is to baptize those disciples. As most Christians know, baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It also serves as the believer's "pledge of allegiance" to Jesus. It is the way in which a person makes his profession of faith public and formally commits himself to being a disciple of Jesus. As such, baptism is often called the Christian's "first (public) act of obedience."

Because of this, it should go without saying that membership in a local church requires baptism. Only Christians can be members of local churches. The church is a gathered community of those who have become disciples of Jesus. But, one cannot be a true disciple if one refuses to obey Christ's commands, and one of His commands is baptism. And this is why we see in the New Testament that every time someone believes in Jesus, he is baptized before his entrance into the visible, local church.

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:40–41).

Notice the sequence here. First, the people received the word. That is, they believed the gospel and were saved. Second, they were baptized. Then, thirdly, they were added to the church. So, the church consists of *baptized believers*.

### **Thesis Three: The Church Is Overseen by Elders Appointed by the Holy Spirit**

The church, as we have seen, is not just an informal meeting. Nor is it disorganized and haphazard in the way it conducts its work. The Lord has established a way for the church to be organized and properly managed. This God-given organization is outlined in the Book of Acts at the end of Paul's First Missionary Journey.

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthen-

ing the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:21–23).

Notice that before the apostles left these churches in God’s hands, they appointed *elders* in each church. We learn more about biblical elders from Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. In verse 28, Paul says to them, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” There are several things we learn about elders from this text and the earlier one in Acts 14. First of all, each church had a *plurality of elders*. That is, there was more than one elder appointed in each church.

Second, we have a job description of the elders. The elders are said to be both overseers and shepherds. An overseer is a leader, a supervisor. A shepherd is one who cares for the flock, feeding them, comforting them, and guiding them. As shepherd of God’s flock, a pastor is one who teaches, warns, corrects, and encourages the members of the church. The elders/pastors, then, are the spiritual leaders of the local church. It is their responsibility to provide direction to the ministry of the church, and to guide the spiritual growth of each church member.

Third, notice that Paul says that it is the *Holy Spirit* who put the elders in their leadership positions. Though the church is involved in appointing elders, ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who puts them in office. And this means that the elders are ultimately responsible to God, not the church. It also means that church members have solemn duties to their pastors. Paul outlines some of these duties in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13a).

There are two duties required of Christians in this text:

(1) *Christians are to acknowledge their pastors’ right to lead.* The NIV translates the Greek as “respect.” Other translations say “appreciate” or “know” your pastors. But, the Greek carries more the idea of “acknowledge” or “recognize.” The idea here is that church members are to acknowledge that their pastors are indeed their pastors! They are to consciously submit to the elders’ leadership.

(2) *Christians are to esteem their pastors.* The NIV says it well when it tells Christians to hold their pastors in “the highest regard.” Pastors deserve to be respected, not so much because they are anything special in themselves, but because

of the noble work they have been called to do. The author of Hebrews echoes Paul's instructions, writing,

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).

This verse commands Christians to obey their pastors. Why? Because the pastors have the difficult task of watching out for the souls of God's flock, and Christians are called to make their job joyful and not burdensome. This requires obedience on the part of the congregation.

### **Thesis Four: The Church Is Distinguished by Three Marks**

There are three marks or indications by which we can tell a true church from a false church; three marks by which we can tell if a church is a church in God's eyes.

(1) *A true church preaches the gospel.* In Acts 2:42, a text we saw earlier, we are told that the early church devoted itself to the apostles' "doctrine." Primarily this refers to the message about the Person and Work of Christ; the gospel message which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). This message includes as well any and all doctrines that flow out of the gospel message. A true church teaches the gospel and clings to the Word of God. A church which fails in this is not really a Christian church. Notice the seriousness with which Paul addresses this issue:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6–9).

Paul pronounces a curse on those who preach a false gospel, such as the Judaizers who taught that one must follow the ceremonial law of Moses if one was truly to be saved. We may presume that any church which preaches a false gospel, or fails to teach the true gospel of justification by faith alone, would receive the same curse.

(2) *A true church faithfully administers the ordinances in accordance with God's Word.* The ordinances, of course, are baptism and the Lord's Supper. We have already addressed the meaning and importance of baptism, but the New Testament equally stresses the significance of the Lord's Supper. Looking at Acts 2:42 once again, we note that another thing the early church devoted itself to was "the breaking of bread." This is most likely a reference to the Lord's Supper. This ordinance symbolizes the sacrificial death of Christ, the bread representing His broken body, and the cup representing His shed blood. Paul speaks of our solemn obligation with regard to this rite:

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself (1 Corinthians 11:27–29).

A true church observes both the ordinance of baptism and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, and it does so with reverence, guided by the teaching of the New Testament.

(3) *A true church practices church discipline.* The Lord Jesus commands the church to hold members accountable to holy living. We find an allusion to this in His Great Commission:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything* I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19–20a).

Jesus tells the church to teach Christian disciples to obey all of His commands. He also gives us specific instruction on what to do if a church member fails in this regard:

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15–17).

Jesus expects the church to confront sinful church members with their sin, and He lays out the procedures to follow in doing so. But, if a church fails to carry

out biblical church discipline, allowing sin to flourish in the church unchallenged, then Jesus has very harsh words for that church:

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You *tolerate that woman Jezebel*, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, *unless they repent of her ways*. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds’” (Revelation 2:18–23).

A church that fails to discipline wayward members is under God’s judgment, and ceases to be a true church. J. L. Dagg, the famous Baptist theologian, once said, “When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Thesis Five: The Church Has Three Ministries That the Lord Has Given it to Perform**

We conclude our study on the nature of the church by discussing her mission. The mission God has given the church is that she fulfill three vital ministries—a ministry to God, a ministry to believers, and a ministry to the world.<sup>2</sup>

(1) *Ministry to God: Worship.* The first and foremost purpose of the church is to worship God. The Bible has a lot to say about worship. The place to start is with Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). To worship in *spirit* means to worship God with a sincere heart, a heart that loves Him and desires to please Him. Only believers can worship God in spirit. To worship in *truth* means to worship in accordance with God’s Word; to worship only as God instructs us to worship.

(2) *Ministry to Believers: Edification.* The church has been given the responsibility to build up believers in their faith (See Matthew 28:19–20; Ephesians 4:11–12; 1 Thessalonians 5:14–15). Helping others grow in Christ is not just the duty of pastors. All Christians are commanded to encourage each other, warn each other, comfort each other, and uphold each other. There is no such thing as a “Lone Ranger Christian.” Without the help of other believers, a Christian will wither up and die! This is why the Book of Hebrews says, “And let us consider how

we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24–25). Here we are reminded of the importance of helping each other grow in Christ. But notice that this duty is connected with the command to not neglect assembling together. The saints cannot be edified if the saints don’t meet!

(3) *Ministry to the World: Benevolence and Missions.* We are to reach out to the unbelieving world with benevolent concern; to work for justice in the world and to care for the sick and poor in his name (Matthew 25:31–40). Even more importantly, we are to minister to the world through missions, by taking the gospel message to our families, our neighbors, and to the ends of the earth. We seek to evangelize the world and bring into God’s kingdom people from every tribe and nation. As Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

### So What?

We have seen that the church is: (1) A gathered community whose members have entered into a solemn covenant with each other; (2) comprised of baptized believers in Christ who have entered into a life of discipleship; (3) led by gifted pastors who have been called and ordained by the Holy Spirit; (4) shows its true allegiance to Jesus by three marks: preaching the gospel, administering the ordinances, and practicing church discipline; and (5) has the mission of worshipping God, edifying believers, and reaching the world with the gospel.

There are a lot of practical applications that we could pursue in light of these truths. Yet, the one basic application that comes out of this study is *the obligation of every Christian to be a member of a local church*. Notice again what we have seen in the course of this study. Christ has created the local church for the express purpose of helping Christians grow in Christ. Apart from the ministry of a local church you cannot grow into a healthy, mature Christian. Christ has given to each believer the church, which has gifted teachers to help you learn the doctrines you are supposed to believe and the lifestyle you are supposed to live. Christ has given you other believers to hold you accountable and to encourage you. It is Christ’s desire that Christians congregate publicly to worship Him together, and He desires that His disciples work together to evangelize the world.

For Christ’s purposes for the church to be fulfilled, for His purposes for you to be fulfilled, you have to make a covenant commitment to a local church, to submit to its pastors, and to put your spiritual gifts to use for the sake of others. This is what the early Christians did. Notice what Luke tells us in Acts:

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colon-

nade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people (Acts 5:12–13).

After Ananias and Sapphira were struck down by the Holy Spirit for their terrible sin, we read that “none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.” This text tells us that many unbelievers in Jerusalem had great respect for the new church, but kept their distance because they were afraid of the serious—even “deadly”—consequences of joining the church. What we need to note here is that the church was seen as something that could be *joined*, and this tells us that the church had a clearly defined membership. It was known who was in and who was out. But we can go further than this by looking more closely at the word “join” that Luke uses in this text. The Greek word used here is *kollao* and it means “to glue” or “cement together.” Don Whitney comments that in the context of Acts 5:13, the word *kollao*

doesn't refer to an informal, merely assumed sort of relationship, but one where you choose to “glue” or “join” yourself firmly to the others...

The same “glue word” is used in the New Testament to describe being joined together in a sexual relationship (1 Corinthians 6:16) and being joined to the Lord in one spirit in salvation (1 Corinthians 6:17)... Clearly this kind of language doesn't refer to a casual, superficial, or informal relationship.

So when it says in Acts 5:13 that no insincere believer dared joined them for a while, the glue word used there speaks of such a cohesive, bonding relationship that it must be referring to a recognized church membership.<sup>3</sup>

The early Christians understood their duty to be committed members of a local church, the household of God. It is important that Christians today understand this, too. To shun this duty is to shun Christ's gift to you. To neglect church membership is to neglect your obedience to Christ. If you love Jesus, you love what he loves; and Jesus loves the church. If you are a Christian, but not a member of a local church, you should make this your first priority. 🐦

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Dagg, *Manuel of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 274.

<sup>2</sup> The content of this section is adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 867–868.

<sup>3</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 46.

# Giving Proper Due To the People in the Pew (Part 2)

## *A Biblical Defense of Lay-Ministry and Lay-Evangelism*

*Bob Gonzales*

The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion.

So concludes Yale church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette.<sup>1</sup> But such lay-evangelism has little scriptural warrant in the minds of some Christian leaders today. I recently posted the question “Do the Reformed Confessions Affirm the Duty of Evangelistic and Missionary Outreach?” on the Puritan Board website. A few respondents seemed irritated that I raised such a question. (After all, didn’t the 17th-century confessions get it all right!) Most were courteous but expressed satisfaction with the scattered references to “the ministry of,” “the preaching of,” and “the administration of” the Word, which refer mainly to the clergy’s preaching-teaching responsibility.<sup>2</sup> One pastor summed up the prevailing opinion well:

I believe most of us are all settled on the role of the preacher in declaring the gospel. I doubt many on the PB will argue against missionaries proclaiming the gospel. But how about the individual pew sitter? Is there a biblical mandate for them to witness or share the gospel? Is one needed? If I am honest to scripture, I have to admit that I cannot find one inference that commands individuals to preach the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, R. Scott Clark, Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Westminster Seminary in California, asserts, “There’s not a lot of evidence in the NT that unordained Christians did much ‘evangelism.’ This is the Achilles’ Heel of modern, populist, democratic, egalitarian evangelicalism.”<sup>4</sup> Such thinking even finds support among some New Testament scholars. W. Paul Bowers offers the following assessment of the New Testament data vis-à-vis lay-evangelism:

The most the evidence indicates is that these churches were to facilitate accessions to their community by an attractive behaviour and by a responsiveness to inquiries. But an energetic, aggressive, mobile missionary

outreach of the sort prosecuted by Paul himself is not described, expected, or enjoined for his churches.<sup>5</sup>

John P. Dickson agrees and avers, “The proclamation of the gospel never appears as even a minor duty of Paul’s converts.”<sup>6</sup> If what these men allege is true, it would appear that countless laypeople through the centuries either have gone “beyond the call of duty” or have assumed a prerogative that does not belong to them. If the latter, we may at least rejoice that God overruled their “evil” for good.

## Defining Terms

I’d like to contest the claim that the New Testament says nothing about lay-evangelism. But we’ll need to define terms first. Terminology like “layman,” “laypeople” and “laity” is commonly used to distinguish the “ordinary” church member from the clergy, i.e., the bishop, pastor or elder.<sup>7</sup> The Greek verb εὐαγγελίζω/εὐαγγελίζομαι (“to evangelize”) simply means, “to communicate good news concerning something.” The noun εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel”) denotes the content of that communication.<sup>8</sup> In Hellenistic and Old Testament usage, the terminology could refer to the good news of a personal blessing experienced (Psalm 40:9; Jeremiah 20:15) but more frequently depicted the announcement of some political or military victory (1 Samuel 31:9; 2 Samuel 4:10; 18:19–20, 26, 31; 1 Kings 1:42; 2 Chronicles 10:9). The Old Testament writers also employed the verb to describe those who celebrate the good news of Yahweh’s past deliverances or announce His future victories (Psalm 68:11; Isaiah 40:9; 60:6; 61:1; Nahum 2:1). Most notable is the usage of εὐαγγελίζομαι in the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 52:7 to portend God’s coming salvation:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him  
*Who brings good news* (εὐαγγελιζομένου),  
Who publishes peace,  
*Who brings good news* (εὐαγγελιζόμενος) of happiness,  
Who publishes salvation,  
Who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

Not surprisingly, the NT writers employ this terminology for the preaching of the good news of God’s climactic work of redemption through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Early in the synoptic Gospels, we read of Jesus “proclaiming the gospel” (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:6).<sup>9</sup> The gospel message and its announcement feature prominently in the Book of Acts (5:42; 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7, 15, 21; 15:7, 35; 16:10; 17:18; 20:24) and most frequently in the Pauline writings.<sup>10</sup> In his first epistle, Peter uses the noun once (4:17) and the verb thrice (1:12, 25; 4:6). The author of Hebrews employs the verb twice (4:2, 6). Neither noun nor verb appears in the epistles of James or Jude.

Though the verb appears twice and the noun once in the Revelation (10:7; 14:6), the apostle John never uses the terminology in his Gospel or his three epistles. The “evangelism” lacuna in John’s Gospel is intriguing. “It would be a mistake, however,” cautions Ulrich Becker, “to assume that because certain NT writings do not use the vb. or the noun, the thought expressed by them is therefore completely lacking.”<sup>11</sup> As it turns out, John’s preferred terminology for communicating the gospel is the Greek verb μαρτυρέω (“to bear witness”).<sup>12</sup> A perusal of the New Testament corpora uncovers a variety of communication-verbs used to depict the work of evangelism,<sup>13</sup> a point often overlooked when assessing the question of whether laypeople may evangelize.

What then is meant by “lay-evangelism”? Lay-evangelism is *the communication of the good news about the person and work of Jesus Christ by non-ordained Christians*.

### Some New Testament Passages Supporting Lay-evangelism

The New Testament evidence for lay-evangelism is not as sparse as some suggest. Due to space constraints, however, we’ll have to limit our survey to a few key texts. Other studies provide a more detailed and exhaustive analysis of the New Testament data.<sup>14</sup>

#### Acts 6:7; 8:1–4; 11:19–21

Without question apostolic preaching features prominently in the Book of Acts. There are, however, a few references to the participation of non-clergy in evangelism. In Acts 6:7, for example, we read, “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” The preceding reference to the apostles’ “to the ministry of the word” (6:4) might incline the reader to credit the gospel’s spread to the apostles’ preaching. The subsequent context urges otherwise. There we find Stephen, one of the seven proto-deacons (Acts 6:1–3, 5–6), preaching the gospel (6:8–10; 7:2–53). Stephen’s bold witness for Christ provokes the Jews’ animosity, and he becomes a martyr (“witness”) in the fullest sense of that word (8:54–60).

The ensuing persecution resulted in the dispersion of the disciples in Jerusalem, both men and women, excepting the apostles (8:1–3). The outcome of the dispersion is underscored in 8:4: “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word [εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον].”<sup>15</sup> John Gill identifies those scattered and preaching as “the seventy disciples and other ministers of the word” in an effort to restrict this evangelistic activity to ordained men.<sup>16</sup> We’re inclined, however, to agree with J. A. Alexander’s interpretation:

The inspired writer, having paused to tell us what became of Stephen and Saul, now resumes his narrative of the dispersion, not by repeating what

he said in v. 1, but by advancing a step further. As he there said that all (except the twelve) were scattered, he now says that all who were thus scattered preached the word. Some would infer from this, that none but preachers were expelled; but it is far more natural to understand the verse as referring, not to preaching in the technical or formal sense, but *to that joyful and spontaneous diffusion of the truth, which is permitted and required of all believers, whether lay or clerical, ordained or unordained* (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

The subsequent context supports Alexander's reading. Once again, Luke provides us with a sample of the kind of evangelism he has in view. Philip, like Stephen, had been ordained to serve tables (Acts 6:1–3, 5–6) in contrast with an official appointment to “the ministry of the word” (6:4). Nevertheless, Philip went to Samaria and “*proclaimed to them the Christ [ἐκήρυσσεν αὐτοῖς τὸν Χριστόν]*” (8:5), resulting in many conversions (8:6–8). Later, the Spirit prompts him to go to Gaza where Philip preaches the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26–40). In these contexts, Philip's activity is depicted three times with the Greek verb “to evangelize” (8:12, 35, 40). It was probably in light of Philip's gifts and success in evangelism that he was later promoted to the more official function of “evangelist” (Acts 21:8).

So the Book of Acts doesn't confine the task of evangelism to the clergy. To be sure, greater attention is given to those whose deeds were most notable (Stephen and Philip). But these exceptionally gifted men were only samples of a more widespread activity on the part of ordinary disciples to proclaim the good news about Jesus. Dennis Johnson captures well the significance of the evangelistic dispersion when he remarks,

As the Lord in Isaiah summoned the people to be his witnesses, so now *all believers*, empowered by the Spirit, can speak the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31). In fact, the first step in the gospel's spread to the earth's ends are taken *not by apostles, but by other Christians*, who are scattered by persecution as the apostles remain in Jerusalem (8:1)” (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

So “scattered disciples,” of which Stephen and Philip were a part, proclaimed the gospel (εὐαγγελίζουμαι) though they were neither apostles nor clergy.

## 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1

In Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, we find two of the apostle's famous “imitation” texts. “I urge you, then,” he says in 4:16, “be imitators of me.” He repeats the injunction again in 11:1: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Read in isolation these directives are somewhat ambiguous. Imitate Paul in what? The context, of course, must answer that question.

The first passage is nestled in a context where Paul contrasts his humility and faithfulness, in the face of rejection and persecution, with the “Christian” trium-

phalism (akin to the “health, wealth and prosperity gospel” of our day) to which some in the Corinthian church were falling prey (4:8–13). Paul urges the Corinthians to reject such triumphalism and, instead, imitate him (4:17). What precisely does Paul expect the Corinthians to “imitate”? A cursory reading might suggest that Paul is simply enjoining a self-sacrificing lifestyle that perseveres in the face of difficulty and opposition. One must probe deeper, though, and inquire what it was about Paul’s life that occasioned hardship and persecution. It wasn’t merely a moral lifestyle. He and the other apostles had become “fools for Christ’s sake” and “the scum of the world” on account of their public attachment to *and communication of the gospel*. Robert Plummer grasps the implication for the Corinthians:

If the Corinthians are to imitate Paul by enduring suffering, mocking and persecution, it is not “suffering for suffering’s sake.” For the Corinthians, as for the apostles, their open adherence to and *proclamation of the “foolishness of the cross”* will result in the world’s disapproval and opposition (emphasis added).<sup>19</sup>

The import of 11:1 is much the same. The paragraph break in most modern English Bibles rightly places 11:1 at the end of an extended section in which Paul addresses the question of things indifferent and the need for those with a strong (informed) conscience to accommodate their behavior in order not to offend those with a weak conscience (chs. 8–10). Paul sets himself forth as the paradigm of such accommodation (8:13; 9:1–27; 10:33). Once again, a cursory reading might lead to the conclusion that Paul’s simply enjoining such attitudes as unselfishness, deference, and love for one’s neighbor. But the Pauline lifestyle the Corinthians are to imitate is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Paul brings this end into sharp focus in 9:19–22 and 10:32–33. He accommodates his lifestyle (not his message) to his audience in order to “win” (κερδαίνω; vv. 19, 20 [2x], 21, 22) or to “save” (σώζω; v. 22) sinners. Of course, Paul wasn’t winning people merely through accommodation. He accommodated to them so that *his communication of the gospel* might bear more fruit: “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, *that they may be saved*” (1 Corinthians 10:31–33; emphasis added). The point is not simply that the Corinthians are to live in a way that doesn’t cause others to stumble and perish. The point is, rather, that the Corinthians are to imitate Paul and Jesus (11:1), both of whom employed an unselfish, deferring lifestyle *as a means to a greater end*—namely, evangelism.

## Ephesians 6:15, 17

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus responds to Peter’s affirmation of Jesus’ messiahship with the programmatic statement: “I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The reader

shouldn't miss Jesus' mixed metaphor—the church is like a *building project* and like a *military operation*. One should also note that neither metaphor conveys a passive or defensive posture. Both metaphors, on the contrary, denote the ideas of growth, advance, completion, and victory.

It's likely Paul had Jesus' dual metaphor in view when he wrote to the Ephesians. The letter focuses largely on Christ's church in this present evil age, and it employs the building and the military metaphor throughout. Consider, for example, 4:7–16. After explaining that “grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift” (4:7), Paul tells us that these grace-gifts are spoils of Christ's military victory over the kingdom of darkness (4:8–10) and describes how these grace-gifts are distributed among the church: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (4:11–12). The special “clerical” gifts are bestowed on the church for the purpose of equipping “the saints,” a reference to all true disciples (clerical and non-clerical), so that they might engage in ministry to the end that Christ's church might be edified.<sup>20</sup> Note the shift from the military to the building metaphor, which is resumed in 4:15–16.

Paul returns to the military metaphor in 6:10–17. Here, he urges the saints to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” and to “put on the whole armor of God, that [they] may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” and all his demonic forces (6:10–13). This is followed by a list of “spiritual armory” with which each believer is to be equipped to fight the good fight of faith (6:14–17). Commentators tend to describe the battle Paul envisions as *defensive* rather than *offensive*. Such a portrayal, however, betrays poor exegesis and misses the bigger picture. The picture is that of soldiers prepared to do battle against the forces of evil with victory, not mere survival, as their goal. The exhortation to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might” (6:10) is intended to stir up the courage necessary for a *forward advance*. Indeed, the terminology “stand against [στῆναι πρὸς]” (6:11), “wrestle against [ἡ πάλη πρὸς]” (6:12), and “withstand [ἀντιστῆναι]” (6:13) are offensive, not merely defensive expressions. Moreover, the “equipment of the saints for the service of ministry” in Ephesians 4:12 is here described in terms of fitting each believer with “spiritual armor.” Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18. Paul is calling the church to storm “the gates of hell.”

With these preliminary observations in view, we're ready to focus on verses 15 and 17. Verse 15 literally reads, “And having your feet fitted in readiness of the gospel of peace” (author's translation). The relationship between the noun translated “readiness” (ἔτοιμασίᾳ) and the genitive “of the gospel” (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) is the *crux interpretum*. Some interpret “of the gospel” as a genitive of source, i.e., the readiness that comes from the gospel (see NIV, NET, ESV). Others, however, interpret “of the gospel” as an objective genitive. So the NRSV reads, “As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace”

(see also NAB, TEV, NJB). This reading fits well with two Old Testament texts Paul may have had in mind:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns” (Isaiah 52:7).

Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off (Nahum 1:15).

If Paul had these passages in view, both of which speak of “feet” (πούς, LXX), “proclaiming the gospel” (εὐαγγελίζομαι, LXX) and “peace” (εἰρήνη, LXX), then he’s portraying the layperson as a fellow-worker with him in spreading those glad tidings that set the prisoner free.<sup>21</sup> The Christian’s ministry would resemble that of his Master who, according to Paul in 2:17, “Came and preached peace to [the Ephesians] who were far off and peace to [the Jewish people] who were near.” Harry Uprichard agrees and remarks, “There is not only the firmness of a defensive stance but the alertness and mobility of an offensive action. This is the Christian soldier’s ‘mission statement.’”<sup>22</sup>

The evangelistic interpretation of verse 15 gains further support when one notes the last piece of the Christian soldier’s panoply in verse 17b. There, Paul enjoins believers to “take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The likelihood that Paul drew nearly all his armory language from Isaiah’s prophecy (see note 21) makes it probable that the reader should also interpret this piece of armory evangelistically. In other words, “the sword [μάχαιραν] of the Spirit, which is the word of God” should be read against the backdrop of Isaiah 49:1–6. There, Yahweh commissions His Servant whose “mouth [is fashioned] like a sharp sword [μάχαιραν]” (49:2) to be a “light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (49:6). As the members of Christ’s body proclaim the gospel, the Servant wields *through them* the “sharp word” that vanquishes the enemy and sets the captives free. So we agree with Clinton Arnold when he writes, “The Word of God and the work of the Spirit are the means by which the people of God step out in defiance of Satan and rob his domain.”<sup>23</sup> This evangelistic interpretation is further confirmed in the three following verses where Paul enjoins the believers to enter the battle in a posture of prayer, seeking God’s grace for their success *and* Paul’s (6:18–20). How does Paul describe his engagement with the enemy?

[Pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly *to proclaim the mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an ambassador in chains, *that I may declare it boldly*, as I ought to speak (emphasis added).

We conclude, then, that Paul expected the Ephesians to join him in that grand building project and military enterprise whose Master Builder and Field Marshall was none other than Jesus Christ. They weren't all called to be apostles or pastors or teachers, but they were called to share the good news as lay-evangelists. Accordingly, the ordained man is responsible not only to set example of evangelistic engagement (2 Timothy 4:5) but also to equip the saints with the spiritual armor requisite for their own missional role in extending Christ's kingdom (Ephesians 4:12; 6:13–17).<sup>24</sup>

### Philippians 1:12–18; 2:15–16

The Philippians, like the Ephesians, may have been tempted to “lose heart” in light of Paul's imprisonment (see Ephesians 3:13). Paul seeks to encourage them with the knowledge that God has used his imprisonment for the gospel's advance:

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear (1:12–14).

Of special note is Paul's reference to “most of the brothers” being emboldened “to speak the word without fear” (1:14). The Greek term translated “brothers” (ἀδελφός) refers to Christians in general. The fact Paul had just addressed the congregation in Philippi as ἀδελφοί (1:12) makes it unlikely that he has clergy exclusively in view in verse 14. It's even possible that the second use of ἀδελφός may be gender inclusive, as is the first. Hence, Paul is probably referring to evangelistic efforts carried on both by laymen and laywomen.<sup>25</sup> So this passage portrays lay-people as “advancing the gospel” (εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 1:12), “speaking the word” (τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν, 1:14), “preaching Christ (τὸν Χριστὸν κηρύσσοσιν, 1:15), and “proclaiming Christ” (τὸν Χριστὸν καταγγέλλουσιν, 1:17). Far from objecting to lay-evangelism Paul celebrates it (1:18) and, by implication, approves it.

The apostle again alludes to the Philippians' gospel witness in 2:14–16. The point of interest is whether Paul portrays their witness as purely passive. Those who argue for a “passive” witness, i.e., godly lifestyle, base their case largely on the meaning of the Greek verb ἐπέχω (2:16), which is translated by many versions (NAS, NKJ, NLT, NET, ESV, CSB) and interpreted by some as “hold fast.”<sup>26</sup> The problem is that the only four other occurrences of this verb in the New Testament are intransitive (Luke 14:7; Acts 3:5; 19:22; 1 Timothy 4:16). In this passage, however, the verb is used transitively with “the word of life” as the object. Consequently, some translations (KJV, DRA, ASV, NIV, NJB) and commentators

favor the idea of “holding *forth* the word of life.”<sup>27</sup> After conducting a thorough survey on the usage of the verb in extra-biblical literature, James Ware concludes, “It can be stated categorically that the verb ἐπέχω does not bear the sense hold fast in any ancient passage, and the etymology and usage of the word ... preclude such a meaning.”<sup>28</sup> If Ware is correct, Paul is calling on the Philippians to imitate him and the other emboldened “brothers” (1:12–18) in functioning as heavenly luminaries (2:15b) not only by means of living the gospel but also by means of *proclaiming the gospel* (2:16a).

We conclude, then, that the Philippians’ partnership with Paul in the gospel (1:4) was to include more than prayer and financial support. Paul wanted them to imitate him, not in assuming the office of apostle but in assuming the role of all Christian disciples, that of shining forth the light of the gospel *both* in conduct *and also* in communication.

## Colossians 4:5–6

Like the letters to the Ephesians and the Philippians, the letter to the Colossians was written while Paul was in prison. As in the case of other believers, Paul expected the Colossians not only to pray for his evangelistic endeavors but also to follow his example. So, after imploring their prayers for his evangelistic efforts (4:3–4), he enjoins them, “With wisdom walk before outsiders, buying the time” (4:5, author’s translation). Obviously, Paul is concerned about the way believers conduct themselves before unbelievers. The method he prescribes, however, seems at first glance obscure. What does it mean to “buy the time”? The translation “redeeming the time,” found in some older translations (KJV, DRA, ASV), is misleading. It conveys the idea of reclaiming time lost (presumably from the devil?). But the Greek verb (ἐξαγοράζω) need not denote “buy back” in this context but simply “buy” or “acquire.” Accordingly, some translations render the phrase as an idiom referring to the wise stewardship of time (see ESV, CSB).

This reading is unlikely, though, in light of Paul’s subsequent exhortation, which refers to the believer’s *verbal communication* with the non-believer. It seems preferable, then, to interpret the Greek τὸν καιρὸν not as “time” but as “opportunity” (NAS, NAB, NIV, NLT, NET; see also 2 Corinthians 6:2). Opportunity for what? Here’s where verse 6 comes into play: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” The Colossians should be alert not merely for opportunities to play the “Good Samaritan.” More than that, they’re to interact with unbelievers through *verbal communication*. Their “speech” (ὁ λόγος) should be both gracious and salty, that is, they must communicate in a way that manifests humility and goodwill on the one hand as well as boldness and honesty on the other.<sup>29</sup>

The reader shouldn’t miss the parallel of thought between Paul’s portrayal of his mission (4:3–4) and Paul’s portrayal of the Colossians’ mission (4:5–6). In both cases, the mission entails interaction with unbelievers. In both cases, the believing

parties are to pray for “open doors” (4:3) and be on the lookout for “opportunities” (4:5). And in both cases, the interaction involves more than passive witness. The Colossians’ duty to “answer each person” with “speech” that is both gracious and truthful (4:6) is essentially equivalent to Paul’s responsibility to “declare the mystery of Christ,” making it “clear, which is how [he] ought to speak” (4:3–4). Paul solicits their prayers for his evangelistic outreach and then encourages the believers to remain alert for gospel opportunities.

## 1 Thessalonians 1:8

In this first letter to the congregation in Thessalonica, Paul praises the newly planted church because “from [them] the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place.” Indeed, the apostle boasts, “Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1:8). The Greek verb translated “sounded forth,” ἐξηγήω, is used in the New Testament only here. In the LXX, it’s used for the clamorous noise of a crowd of people (Joel 4:14 [English reference 3:14]). The apocryphal book Sirach employs it to denote the reverberating sound of a thunderclap (40:13). With a touch of metaphor, then, Paul is saying something like “The proclamation from Thessalonica was set at high volume and went out with great force over a large area.”<sup>30</sup> In addition to proclaiming the objective truths of the gospel, the Thessalonians had also shared their subjective experience, that is, their “faith in God” (cf. 1:9–10). “Having received the gospel,” notes F. F. Bruce, “the Thessalonian Christians had no thought of keeping it to themselves; by word and life they made it known to others. From the beginning they functioned as a missionary church.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite the apparent evangelistic thrust of this text, some scholars attempt to reduce the “noise” from Thessalonica to a merely passive witness. According to W. P. Bowers, “the word of the Lord ringing out” refers simply to news of the Thessalonians’ conversion and godly lifestyle.<sup>32</sup> But the following considerations make this view untenable. First, the phrase “the word of the Lord” consistently refers to the objective truths of the gospel not to one’s personal testimony (Acts 8:25; 13:44, 48, 49; 15:35; 16:32; 19:10, 20). Paul uses the phrase in his second letter to the Thessalonians when he asks them to pray for his own evangelistic labors: “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you” (2 Thessalonians 3:1). Second, a godly lifestyle has no meaning apart from a propositional interpretation of that lifestyle. That the Thessalonians stopped worshipping idols and turned to the living God could only have Christian significance if a gospel explanation accompanied that change. Third, as a result of the Thessalonians “noising the word abroad,” Paul could say, “We need not say anything.” While Paul may be employing some hyperbole here, he seems to imply that it was not merely the message of changed lives that went abroad but that of the gospel itself. Finally, preceding and following this verse, Paul commends the Thessalonians for imitating not only him and his missionary

band (1:6) but also the churches in Judea (2:14) in their willingness to endure rejection and suffering. Of course, as Jo-Ann Grant rightly observes, “The equation of ‘imitation’ and suffering affliction ignores the fact that the Thessalonians were engaged in some activity that incurred the opposition of others.” So what was that activity for which the missionaries and Judean churches suffered? Paul clearly alludes to it in 1 Thessalonians 2:14b–16a:

For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they [the Judean churches] did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us *from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved* (emphasis added).

In conclusion, Paul commends these believers not only for their godly conduct but also for their evangelistic zeal. In the words of one commentator, “The evangelized become the evangelists.”<sup>33</sup>

## Hebrews 5:12

One of the main burdens of the author of Hebrews is to demonstrate how New Covenant realities fulfill Old Covenant shadows. At one point, as he’s presenting Christ as the Great High Priest to whom all OT priests were but types, he pauses to admonish his audience for failing to grasp these gospel realities as they should have by now: “by this time you ought to be teachers” (5:12). The text implies that individual believers ought to strive for doctrinal and practical maturity that *they might communicate accurately the gospel for the benefit of others*. There’s no indication in the immediate or larger context that the writer has narrowed his focus to ministerial aspirants. “He does not mean by this that they should all be ordained ministers,” says Richard Phillips, “but that they ought to be able to instruct others in the faith.”<sup>34</sup> So he’s referring to laypeople, and he’s referring to their need to grow in competence to instruct others in the gospel.

Some object that laypeople are not sufficiently gifted or mature to instruct others in the faith.<sup>35</sup> But the author of Hebrews has higher expectations for his audience than some modern Reformed leaders seem to have for their congregations. Certainly, there are many Aquilas (laymen) and Priscillas (laywomen) who can be equipped to expound “the way of God more accurately” even to Apollos (clergy) who are otherwise “competent in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24–26).

## 1 Peter 2:9; 3:15

According to 1 Peter 2:9, God has granted the church a privileged status to carry out a particular function. The function is to “proclaim” our Redeemer’s excellencies. The Greek verb ἐξαγγέλλω means to *report, announce, or declare*. Ac-

ording to John Brown, “Christians, as the called of God, are intended to show forth the excellencies of God, both passively and actively.”<sup>36</sup> John Calvin agrees and writes, “It behooves us to declare these excellencies not only by tongue, but also by our whole life.”<sup>37</sup> The fact that Peter, in the larger context, addresses the church in corporate (e.g., “a spiritual house”) and in individual language (e.g., “living stones”) suggests that the privileged responsibility has a corporate and individual dimension. Some may confine the verbal proclamation to the setting of corporate worship. Even if Peter’s purview were that narrow, an evangelistic element would not be precluded (compare 1 Corinthians 14:23–25). Nevertheless, the church’s calling in this world is surely not limited to corporate worship on Sunday. Hence, it’s also possible that the verb Peter uses here connotes the idea of *proclaiming abroad*. D. Edmond Hiebert thinks so and sees “a message being proclaimed to those outside what has taken place within. It indicates,” argues Hiebert, “the evangelistic function of the church.”<sup>38</sup>

If one doubts an “outside the church” application for 1 Peter 2:9, he’s forced to concede such an application in 1 Peter 3:15, which reads, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” The phrase “make a defense” translates the Greek word ἀπολογία from which we derive the English word “apologetics.” Peter’s not thinking primarily of a general apologetic for a theistic worldview. He’s referring to reasoned defense of gospel hope. And lest we interpret the passage with the sense “don’t speak unless first asked,” let me highlight two realities that preclude such a reading. First, the fact an unbeliever would ask for such an apologetic *assumes that some gospel witness has already been communicated*. Folks don’t just walk up out of the blue and say, “Why do you believe your sins are forgiven and you’re going to heaven?” unless they’ve heard about the gospel we believe. Second, this whole epistle is written to Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. *It assumes they’re sharing the gospel* and that, as a result, they, like the apostles and other gospel heralds, may find themselves arraigned before unfriendly audiences where they must defend their gospel hope. Far from encouraging a non-initiatory approach to evangelism, this text assumes Spirit-filled boldness and active witness on the part of the believer.

These are some passages in the New Testament that provide warrant for laying a measure of evangelistic responsibility at the feet of lay-people. Of course, we must make appropriate qualifications. Not everyone is called to serve Christ as an ordained pastor, church-planter, or missionary. Nor does every Christian have the same measure of opportunities. Nor does every believer possess the same level of doctrinal and practical maturity to communicate the gospel effectively and accurately. So the weight of responsibility on each Christian will differ. Nevertheless, it doesn’t appear wide the mark to conclude that the Scriptures give warrant for us to affirm not only the church’s responsibility to preach the gospel in the context of corporate worship and to commission church planters and missionaries to take

the gospel to the nations but also the individual believer's responsibility to be salt and light by life and lip in the midst of a lost and perishing world.<sup>39</sup>

## A Final Word About Words

Before concluding this study, I must add a word about what I perceive to be an irresponsible handling of terminology by those who would begrudge the laity of the privilege and task of evangelism. As noted in the introduction, Reformed theologian R. Scott Clark argues, "There's not a lot of evidence in the NT that non-ordained Christians did much 'evangelism.'" How does someone like Clark wiggle around the NT evidence just presented? The answer lies, I believe, in Clark's use of the term "evangelism." I suspect that Clark views "evangelism" as technical terminology that belongs solely to the province of the clergy. Many think the same about the Greek vocabulary for "preaching." Such terms as the verb κηρύσσω and the noun κήρυγμα refer exclusively, in the minds of some, to preaching a sermon from a pulpit. Consequently, Reformed leaders like Clark will with one hand deny "evangelism" to the laity but will with the other hand allow the laity to "witness." "It's probably better," argues Clark, "to speak about lay witness to THE faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) as summarized in the Apostles' Creed and explained by the Reformed churches in the confessions. God's unordained people should also be able to give witness to THEIR (his or her) personal faith" (emphasis his).<sup>40</sup>

This line of reasoning is fallacious. First, as I noted above ("Defining Terms" on page 12), a concept may be present though the technical vocabulary be absent. Even if the technical terms for "evangelism" weren't predicated of laity in the NT, that doesn't mean that the laity never did what the terminology conveys. There's not a universe of difference between "evangelism" and "wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17), or "speaking boldly the word without fear" (Philippians 1:14), or "sounding forth the word" (1 Thessalonians 1:8), or "being prepared to make a defense for one's gospel hope" (1 Peter 3:15). Second, there are passages in which the terms for "evangelism" (εὐαγγελίζω/εὐαγγελίζομαι, εὐαγγέλιον) are predicated of non-clergy (Acts 8:4; 11:20; Ephesians 6:15; Philippians 1:12, 14). Third, the word "witness" hardly avoids the clerical overtones that Clark and other Reformed folks want to keep out of the reach of the laity. As noted above ("Defining Terms"), the apostle John's preferred verb for communicating the good news about Christ was μαρτυρέω, "to bear witness." Throughout John's Gospel this term is employed to denote *the official witness* that the Old Testament Scripture writers bore of Christ (5:39), that John the Baptist bore of Christ (1:15, 32, 34; 3:26; 5:33), that Jesus bore of himself and the truth (1:8; 3:11; 3:32; 4:44; 5:31, 36; 7:7; 8:13-14, 18; 10:25; 18:37), that the Father bore of Christ (5:32, 37; 8:18), that the Spirit would bear of Christ (15:26), and that Christ's chosen apostles were to bear of Him (1:34; 15:27; 19:35; 21:24). If there were ever a role that might be too lofty for laypeople, it would be "bearing

witness”!<sup>41</sup> Of course, the apostle John wasn’t so penurious with his vocabulary as some modern clericalists. He was willing to describe a crowd of people flocking to Jesus on the basis of a Samaritan woman’s “testimony [μαρτυρούσης]” (4:39). And John will use the Greek noun μάρτυς to designate those “martyrs,” whether clergy or laity, who seal their *verbal testimony* with their own blood (Revelation 17:6). Similarly, Mark could employ the Greek verb for “preaching” (κηρύσσω) to describe Jesus’s official proclamation of the gospel (Mark 1:14), on the one hand, and the enthusiastic testimonies of a leper now healed, a demoniac now freed, and a deaf-dumb man now hearing and speaking (Mark 1:45; 5:20; 7:32), on the other hand. If Scripture writers used gospel vocabulary to predicate both clerical and non-clerical activity, why can’t we?

In conclusion, I want to restate the purpose of this two-part essay. I’m concerned about a *tendency* in some Reformed circles to *overemphasize the importance of the ordained man’s ministry and to underemphasize the importance of the layperson’s ministry*. Certain Reformed leaders and scholars seem inclined to define the life and ministry of a local church more narrowly in terms of *what happens in the pulpit on Sundays* rather than more broadly in terms of *what happens in the pulpit, in the pew, and outside the church all seven days of the week*. Healthy church life and ministry is construed mainly in terms of “the preached Word and sacraments” rather than holistically in terms that give proper place to lay-ministry and lay-evangelism. We shouldn’t deny the unique role of the pastoral office or the reality of varied levels of communication-gift. But the activities of ministry and evangelism are not the sole province of the clergy. My hope is that Christian pastors and leaders will strive to equip their flock with the knowledge, skill, and motivation to serve the body and to share the gospel. My prayer is that the non-ordained saints will understand that their role extends beyond singing hymns, listening to sermons, and keeping out of trouble. Jesus may not have authorized them to serve the church as pastors. But he’s authorized them to be more than “pew-potatoes.” They can serve and share the gospel in keeping with their level of gift and maturity. This is the proper due of the people in the pew. 🍷

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 1:116. Comments made by some of the early church fathers corroborate Latourette’s assessment. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 10.2; Tertullian, *Apolo-gy*, 1.7; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 3.55.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the Westminster Confession of Faith 7.6; 10.3, 4; 14.1; 23.3; Larger Catechism 35; 68; 155; 159; and Shorter Catechism 89.

<sup>3</sup> One of the comments made on a discussion thread dealing with the question, “Do the Reformed Confessions Affirm the Duty of Evangelistic and Mis-sionary Outreach?” which can be found on the Puritan Board:

<http://www.puritanboard.com/f71/do-reformed-confessions-affirm-duty->

For more examples, see also the discussion under the thread, “The Pastor Only Should Evangelize”:

<http://www.puritanboard.com/f19/pastor-only-should-evangelize-29582/>

<sup>4</sup> “Missional Monday: Should Evangelism Happen Only in the Church?” accessed on April 22, 2009 on the Internet: <http://heidelblog.wordpress.com/2008/02/25/missional-monday-should-evangelism-happen-only-in-the-church/>.

<sup>5</sup> “Church and Mission in Paul,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44 (1991): 111.

<sup>6</sup> “Promoting the Gospel: ‘Mission-Commitment’ in the Churches of Paul Against Its Jewish Background” (PhD diss., Marquarie University, 2001), 311.

<sup>7</sup> We looked at the biblical justification for this distinction in Part One of this series. See Part 1 of “Giving Proper Due to the People in the Pew” in *Founders Journal*, 79 (Winter 2010), 6–21.

<sup>8</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd edition (United Bible Societies, 1988, 89), § 33.215, 217 [pp. 412–13].

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes the concept of “preaching the gospel” is conveyed by the verb alone (Matthew 11:5; Luke 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18; 7:22; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1). In other cases, the noun “gospel” is preceded by a verb of communication (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13; Mark 1:14; 13:10; 14:9).

<sup>10</sup> The references are too numerous to list. I counted 57 uses of the noun and 19 uses of the verb.

<sup>11</sup> “Gospel, Evangelize, Evangelist,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 2:110.

<sup>12</sup> John uses the verb at least 30 times in his Gospel; nine times in his epistles; and three times in Revelation. He uses the noun “witness” five times in Revelation.

<sup>13</sup> Such verbs include but aren’t limited to λαλέω (“to speak”); προσλαλέω (“to address”); κηρύσσω (“to preach”); διδάσκω (“to teach”); κατηχέω (“to teach or catechize”) ἀναγγέλλω (“to proclaim”); ἀπαγγέλλω (“to declare”); ἔξαγγέλλω (“to announce”); παρρησιάζομαι (“to speak boldly”); διαλέγομαι (“to discuss”); προγράφω (“to portray”); πληροφορέω (“to recount fully”); διηγέομαι (“to report”); διαφημίζω (“to publish abroad”); ὁμολογέω (“to confess”); ἐξηχέω (“to sound forth”).

<sup>14</sup> Andreas J. Koestenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2001); Peter T. O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1995); Robert L. Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Exeter: Paternoster, 2006); Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2004); James Patrick Ware, “The Mission of

the Church in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism." *Supplements to Novum Testamentum* 120 (Leiden: Brill, 2005). For less technical and more popular treatments of the subject, see Mark Dever, *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007); R. B. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1966); Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People*, 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> A parallel text is found in Acts 11:19–21.

<sup>16</sup> *The Exposition of the New Testament* (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1852), 1:858.

<sup>17</sup> *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (1857; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1984), 319.

<sup>18</sup> *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1997), 45.

<sup>19</sup> *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> For my exposition of Ephesians 4:12, see Part 1 of "Giving Proper Due to the People in the Pew" in *Founders Journal*, 79 (Winter 2010), 14–17.

<sup>21</sup> The likelihood that Paul drew much of the metaphors of armory from Isaiah's prophecy (compare Ephesians 4:14a with Isaiah 11:5; Ephesians 4:14b with Isaiah 59:17; Ephesians 6:17a with Isaiah 59:17; Ephesians 6:17b with Isaiah 49:2) makes it all the more likely that he had Isaiah 52:7 in view when composing Ephesians 6:15.

<sup>22</sup> *A Study Commentary on Ephesians* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 365. And what a mission! "It is a striking paradox," notes G. B. Caird, "that the soldier should be equipped for battle with a declaration of peace." *Paul's Letters from Prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 93. See also F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 408; Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 206; Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 477–79.

<sup>23</sup> *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1992), 157. Others who interpret Ephesians 6:15 evangelistically include Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, in AB (New York, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1960), 777; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42 of The Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Word Books, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Jay Adams offers a couple of pages of advice for pastors in the realm of leadership and refers to the approach that doesn't expect or prepare members to evangelize as an example of leadership failure. *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974, 75), 339–44.

<sup>25</sup> The reader should note that the "brothers," whom Paul addresses in 1:12, are identified as "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons." (1:1). So the term "brothers" like "saints" may include office-

bearers but is not limited to them in this context.

<sup>26</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians* (Eerdmans, 1991), 297; Vern Poythress, "Hold Fast' versus 'Hold Out' in Philippians 2:16," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2002): 45–53; Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 146.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 92–93; John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1884), 142; I-Jin Loh and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1977), 71.

<sup>28</sup> "Holding Forth the Word of Life': Paul and the Mission of the Church in the Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Second Temple Judaism" (PhD diss.; Yale University Press, 1996), 299–300. Cited in Plummer, 75.

<sup>29</sup> The phrase "seasoned with salt" refers to the opposite of what is insipid, innocuous, or compromisingly inoffensive.

<sup>30</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 101–02.

<sup>31</sup> *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, in *The Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Word Books, 1982), 16. See also Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 101–05; Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 37–38.

<sup>32</sup> This is how Bowers interprets other NT texts where Paul seems to allude to evangelistic ministry among laypeople. "Church and Mission in Paul," 92–101.

<sup>33</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians, Interpretation* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Hebrews*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2006), 176.

<sup>35</sup> See D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 109.

<sup>36</sup> *Expository Discourses on First Peter* (reprint, The Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1958), 1:317. Brown goes on to make application: "By your lips, by your lives ... honour Him who has called you" (1:321).

<sup>37</sup> *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 12:266.

<sup>38</sup> *1 Peter* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 144. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37 of NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 115–16; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 92–93.

<sup>39</sup> Plummer, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission*, 144.

<sup>40</sup> "Missional Monday: Should Evangelism Happen Only in the Church?" The same line of reasoning and preference for "witness" over "evangelism" was reiterated several times on the Puritan Board thread I referenced earlier (see note 3 above).

<sup>41</sup> Throughout the rest of the NT, the "witness" terminology is used primarily in the more official sense, particularly of the apostolic witness.

# Discipleship in the Puritan Era

*Winfield Bevins*

The English Puritans were a 16th and 17th century movement that sought to purify the Church of England in worship and doctrine. They were the outgrowth of the Protestant Reformation and they heavily influenced the later development of Christianity in North America. The Puritans were Reformed and emphasized the necessity of spiritual conversation. The Puritans placed a special emphasis on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in salvation which strongly influenced modern Evangelicalism.

Contemporary Evangelicals are beginning to look once again to the Puritans for their robust theology.<sup>1</sup> What is not so widely known about the Puritans is their emphasis on discipleship and how that can speak today in the 21st century. J. I. Packer says, “The Puritans were robust in their view of life. To be a Puritan was to look forward to the glory that is to come and to prepare for a good death — that would be the last act of a life of good and faithful discipleship.”<sup>2</sup> Here are a few ways that the Puritans made gospel centered disciples.

## Biblical Preaching

Ivonwy Morgan said, “The essential thing in understanding the Puritans was that they were preachers before they were anything else...what bound them together, undergirded their striving, and gave them the dynamic to persist as their consciousness that they were called to preach the Gospel.”<sup>3</sup> The Puritan era produced some of the greatest preachers England has even known.<sup>4</sup> Men such as William Perkins (1558–1602), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) and John Owen (1616–1683) were theological giants as well as great biblical preachers.

The Puritan pastor played an important role in discipleship of believers through preaching and personally catechizing the flock.<sup>5</sup> One of the primary reasons Puritans were great preachers is because they were men of prayer who loved the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Their sermons were biblically grounded and saturated with doctrine and devotion to the risen Christ.<sup>7</sup> J. I. Packer offers the following marks of Puritan preaching:

1. Expository in its method
2. Doctrinal in its content
3. Orderly in its arrangement
4. Popular in its style
5. Christ centered in its orientation
6. Experimental in its interests

7. Piercing in its application
8. Powerful in its manner<sup>8</sup>

The Puritans took the sermon beyond the pulpit on Sunday morning. Men, women, boys and girls were all expected to hear, discuss and apply the sermon to their everyday lives. Families were encouraged to discuss the sermon around the dinner table and at home throughout the week. Erroll Hulse said, “Heads of families should make sure that the sermon materials are retained. Encourage lively discussion and repletion of the main heads of the exposition at meal table.”<sup>9</sup> In a similar way, Mark Dever says, “They realized that in preaching their sermons well they would be educating the church. That’s why they would encourage families to rehearse the sermons at the dinner table.”<sup>10</sup> By encouraging families to discuss the sermon each week discipleship was extended from the pulpit to the home. Families played an important role in discussing the sermon in informal small groups.

## Devotional Writing

Packer says, “Puritan pastors insisted that part of being a good Christian was to read Puritan devotional books, and so a common literature bound the constituency together.”<sup>11</sup> The Puritans were prolific authors who produced a plethora of devotional books and pamphlets for their followers. William Perkins’ writings totaled over 2,500 pages and were translated into half a dozen languages. John Owen works are collected in 24 volumes, including his large work on the Holy Spirit and his seven-volume commentary on Hebrews. John Bunyan wrote 60 books over a 30 year time period. Richard Baxter also wrote an impressive 1143 pages on various topics from pastoral ministry to dying well.

Nearly 300 years ago, George Whitefield said, “Though dead, they by their writings yet speak.”<sup>12</sup> Their writings still have power and influence today. Packer passionately reminds us, “The unction continues, the authority is still felt, and the mature wisdom still remains breathtaking, as all modern Puritan-readers soon discover for themselves. Through the legacy of this literature the Puritans can help us today towards the maturity that they knew, and that we need.”<sup>13</sup>

## Catechisms and Creeds

The Puritans also used catechisms, creeds and confessions to disciple their flocks.<sup>14</sup> A catechism is the process of instructing believers both young and old in the basics of the Christian faith. Catechisms provide basic summaries of the church’s teachings to ensure that all members of the church understand the essentials of the faith for themselves. Most catechisms generally have questions and answers accompanied by biblical support and explanations.

The Puritans developed their own catechisms, including the Westminster Larger and Smaller Catechisms in the 1640’s. For many Protestant Christians ev-

erywhere, the Westminster Catechisms are the most important and influential of all the Reformed catechisms. These documents were written to provide children, new believers, and church members alike a short but comprehensive summary of the Reformed church's doctrines.

Puritan pastors encouraged heads of families to catechize family members in their home. Richard Baxter said, "Persuade the master of every family to cause his children and servants to repeat the Catechism to him, every Sabbath evening, and to give him some account of what they have heard at church during the day."<sup>15</sup> Puritan pastors regularly visited the homes of their flock to catechize families. They believed that the pastor had a personal responsibility to personally catechizing church members.<sup>16</sup>

## Keeping the Sabbath Holy

The Puritans are well known for keeping the Sabbath.<sup>17</sup> They believed the Sabbath was a command not an option. They knew the spiritual significance of keeping the Sabbath day holy. The Westminster Confession described the Sabbath in the following way:

This Sabbath is to be kept holy unto the Lord when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy [21:8].

The Puritans can teach contemporary Christians a lot about Sabbath rest. Throughout the Bible God promises rest to His people. The biblical word for rest literally means to cease from work.<sup>18</sup> Rest is the reason why God commanded us to keep the Sabbath. Jesus said that the Sabbath was created so that man may have rest and not man for the Sabbath. Even doing a good work for the Lord can be a distraction if there is no time to rest. Ministers are burning out at an unbelievable rate. Nearly 90% of pastors feel overworked and 50% of those who go into fulltime service drop out in 5 years.<sup>19</sup> Spiritual burnout occurs when pastors don't give themselves time to rest from their daily routine. Puritans were a great example for spiritual rest because they kept the Sabbath day holy.

The Lord's day is not for idleness.<sup>20</sup> The Puritan's observance of the Lord's Day was not a time of solitary retreat and inactivity; rather it was a time spent doing spiritual work in the company of family. Baxter, said, "Persuade the master of every family to cause his children and servants to repeat the catechism to him, every Sabbath evening, and to give him some account of what they have heard at church the day."<sup>21</sup>

## Family Ministry

Lastly, the Puritans emphasized the value and importance of family ministry. The Christian family was one of the hallmarks of the Puritan era and one of their greatest legacies.<sup>22</sup>

J.I. Packer said of the Puritan family:

“It is hardly too much to say that the Puritans created the Christian family in the English-speaking world. The Puritan ethic of marriage was to look not for a partner whom you do love passionately at this moment, but rather for one whom you can love steadily as your best friend for life, and then to proceed with God’s help to do just that. The Puritan ethic of nurture was to train up children in the way they should go, to care for their bodies and souls together, and to educate them for sober, godly, socially useful adult living.”<sup>23</sup>

The puritan pastor Richard Baxter knew the importance of family ministry. He said:

“We must have a special eye upon families, to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed. The life of religion, and the welfare and glory of both the Church and the State, depend much on family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all.... I beseech you, therefore, if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people, do all you can to promote family religion.”<sup>24</sup>

The Puritans believed that their home was their church. They knew the call to “make disciples” begins in the home. In his farewell sermon, Jonathan Edwards said, “Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief means of grace.”<sup>25</sup> Fathers in particular had a spiritual responsibility to pastor their wives and children. Thomas Doo Little said:

“Masters of families ought to read the Scripture to their families and instruct their children and servants in the matters and doctrines of salvation. Therefore, they are to pray in and with their families. No man that will not deny the Scripture can deny the unquestionable duty of reading the Scripture in our houses, governors of families teaching and instructing them out of the Word of God.”<sup>26</sup>

Husbands and wives had a spiritual responsibility to help disciple one another. Richard Baxter spoke of the spiritual duties of husbands and wives toward each other:

One of the most important duties of a husband to his wife and a wife to her husband is to carefully, skillfully, and diligently help each other in the knowledge and worship, and obedience of God that they might be saved and grow in their Christian life... Watch over the hearts and lives of one another, judging the condition of each other's souls, and the strength or weakness of each others sins and graces, and the failings of each other's lives, so that you may be able to apply to one another the most suitable help.... Do not discourage your spouse from instructing you by refusing to receive and learn from their corrections.... Join together in frequent and fervent prayer. Prayer forces the mind into sobriety, and moves the heart with the presence and majesty of God. Pray also for each other when you are in secret, that God may do that work which you most desire, upon each other's hearts.<sup>27</sup>

The Puritan believed that it was a parent's spiritual responsibility to disciple and teach their children about the faith. This meant that the home was the primary place of learning the Bible and moral instruction and that it was important for children to begin learning about God and the Bible at home. The Bible tells parents, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Puritans discipleship began in the home, by spouses loving each other with the love of Christ and by teaching, loving, and disciplining their children for the glory of God.

## Conclusion

For the Puritans discipleship was a way of life. It involved many facets as they sought to live out the gospel and stay oriented to the truths of God's Word. They kept themselves under the preaching of Scripture as they regularly read and heard sermons. They read devotional writings and made use of catechisms, creeds and confessions of faith. They observed the Lord's Day and sought to exemplify the gospel in their homes. In all these ways, we have much we can learn from the Puritans. May God grant us their zeal in our day as we seek to shape our lives to the glory of God. 🌹

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 11.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, "Physicians of the Soul," *Christian History and Biography*, 89 (Winter 2006), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ivonwy Morgan, *The Godly Preachers of the Elizabethan Church* (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 280–281.

<sup>5</sup> See Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of

Truth Trust, 2001). The entire book is dedicated to training pastors on reformed ministry which included preaching and personally catechizing.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 122.

<sup>7</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 284.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 284–288.

<sup>9</sup> Erroll Hulse, “The Puritans and the Recovery of the Lord’s Day” in *Reclaiming the Gospel and Reforming Churches*, ed. Tom Ascol (Cape Coral, FL: Founder Press, 2003), 666.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Dever, “The Value of the Puritans for SBC Ministry” in *Reclaiming the Gospel and Reforming Churches*, 624.

<sup>11</sup> Packer, “Physicians of the Soul,” 12.

<sup>12</sup> George Whitfield, quoted in *A Quest for Godliness*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Van Dyken, *Rediscovering Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 177.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Erroll Hulse, “The Puritans and the Recovery of the Lord’s Day,” 666.

<sup>18</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, ND), 969.

<sup>19</sup> H. B. London and Neil Wiseman, *Pastors at Risk* (Portland, OR: Victor Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*. 239.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 101.

<sup>22</sup> See the Westminster Directory of Family Worship. 1647.

<sup>23</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*. 239.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 226.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Farewell Sermon.” <http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/works1.i.xxvi.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Doo Little, *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689, Being the Morning Exercises at Cripple Gate*, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 216.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 178.

## Breakfast with Wayne Grudem

The Founders Fellowship Breakfast will be held at 6:30 AM on June 14, 2011 at the Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix Arizona. Wayne Grudem will be speaking on “You, Your Church and Your Government.”

Plan to join us in the Valley of the Sun Room, Section A on the Second Level of the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown Hotel. Tickets are \$20 and include breakfast. Those who register by May 9th will receive a discount of \$5 off the ticket price. Registration closes June 6, 2011.

Register online at: [www.founders.org/conferences/ffb/](http://www.founders.org/conferences/ffb/)

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