

**Paul's Theology of Evangelism:  
Gospel-Proclaimers and Gospel-Promoters Today**

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Paul is Christianity's missionary *par excellence*. Upon his dramatic conversion, he was commissioned by God to be "a chosen instrument . . . to carry [God's] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Paul had great zeal for this task, and he extensively engaged in all kinds of evangelistic endeavors: in synagogues, with individuals, in public halls, in homes, and through letters. God blessed his ministry, and Paul planted churches and tended to new flocks all across the Greek and Roman world of the first century. His example in Acts and deposit of teaching in his epistles remain for Christians and are a large piece of the apostolic foundation that continue to encourage and instruct Christians today.

Some contemporary Evangelicals use Paul as an example for missions and evangelism that all Christians should follow.<sup>1</sup> It only makes sense that contemporary Evangelicals, who place a premium on conversions and evangelism that leads thereto, would do this.<sup>2</sup> But our relationship to Paul, as an apostle given an extraordinary call in the foundational stage of the new covenant church's existence, is more complex than that. We cannot simply place the demand on each and every Christian that they are to be evangelists and church planters in the same way Paul was. A close evaluation of Paul's teaching is necessary to understand his view of the "ordinary" Christian's relationship to evangelism.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Christopher R. Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul: Biblical Mission for the Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); I. Howard Marshall, "Luke's Portrait of the Pauline Mission," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Leicester, England: APOLLOS; Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 112 ("[T]he story of Paul as a missionary is told in order to give the church a pattern to follow in its continuing life").

<sup>2</sup> See M. Veeneman, "Evangelicalism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed., ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 291–92.

Much has been written on Paul, missions, and the church today.<sup>3</sup> We should pause to consider our terminology and scope of this paper by looking at two pairs of words. First, “mission” and “evangelism,” though related, are separate terms, especially in missiological discussions today.<sup>4</sup> While not unconcerned with “mission,” this paper’s focus is on evangelistic acts themselves, and we will operate with Bosch’s definition of evangelism: “[O]ffer[ing] every person, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged by the gospel of explicit faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> This primarily means the verbal explanation of the contents of the gospel to another person or persons directly. Second, “church” and “individual” are easy to conflate in these discussions. Our inquiry is not whether the church as an institution carries the obligation to engage in evangelism,<sup>6</sup> but whether individual Christians are obligated to be evangelists in any way.

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<sup>3</sup> A modern renaissance in the study of the mission of the church and evangelism began when David J. Bosch wrote his theological and historical study, beginning with the New Testament and continuing through the modern missions movement. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991). He is especially noted for his treatment of the enlightenment’s effects on missions. He spurred a new generation of theologians who have argued over the biblical nature of missions. Some of the most significant works in the field include the following: Paul Bowers, “Church and Mission in Paul,” *JSNT* 44 (1991): 89–111; Peter T. O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1995); Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leister, England: APOLLOS; Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2001); John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity; Leicester, England: APOLLOS, 2004); Robert L. Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock; Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2006); James P. Ware, *Paul and the Mission of the Church: Philippians in Ancient Jewish Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 409–14.

<sup>5</sup> David J. Bosch, “Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today,” in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, ed. Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 17.

<sup>6</sup> It is under the obligation to proclaim the gospel to all, and the church is the means God uses ordinarily for conversion and ongoing discipleship of the Christian. WLC 63.

In short, our answer to the question is a qualified “yes.” Paul does not advocate that every Christian be an evangelist in the way he himself is, and instead he distinguishes between gospel-proclaimers and gospel-promoters. Paul’s theology is concerned that (1) individuals who are gifted and called to the work of evangelism fulfill those callings as gospel-proclaimers, though (2) each Christian has certain gospel-promoting obligations, most notably that he should live a life that is attractive to non-believers, being able and willing to bear witness to the gospel when opportunities arise. Evangelism as a set of outreach and gospel-sharing requirements is not a “law” that can be demanded of all Christians to fulfill (and risk church discipline if they do not), though Christians should rightly be called to exercise their spiritual gifts and overflow with the fruit of the Spirit. In these ways, Christians are called to various levels of evangelistic engagement with unbelievers.

Our consideration of this issue will proceed in three parts: first, considering the lack of express command for individuals to evangelize or preach the gospel in the Pauline corpus; second, evaluating who Paul considers to be called to engage in evangelism specifically as gospel-proclaimers; and third, looking to a few strands in Paul’s thought that have positive implications for every believer to be involved in evangelism as gospel-promoters.

#### I. NO EXPRESS COMMAND FOR INDIVIDUALS TO EVANGELIZE OR “PREACH”

Paul makes no express command or encouragement to individuals to be involved in evangelism, and this fact is not lost on scholars. Ware describes “the paucity of information in Paul’s letters concerning the role of his congregations in the advancement of the gospel,”<sup>7</sup> and

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<sup>7</sup> Ware, *Paul and the Mission of the Church*, 5.

Schnabel finds this “striking” that the “numerous, often rather specific exhortations” of Paul to the churches “do not include appeals to be active in missions and evangelism.”<sup>8</sup> This lack in Paul’s writings is well-recognized in scholarship. But let us first establish this conclusion from the biblical text before considering what possible ways forward there might be, given this conclusion.

1. *Scriptural basis for lack of Pauline command for personal evangelism.* While it is impossible to prove a negative without considering the Pauline corpus exhaustively, we will here evaluate a handful of texts that get closest to a Pauline affirmation of an individual evangelistic command. None of them definitively constitute a Pauline command for all Christians to engage in gospel-proclaiming, but many of them are still instructive for related issues.

a. *Romans 1:8 and 1 Thessalonians 1:8.* In both of these passages Paul expresses his thankfulness to God for his recipients. To the Romans he says he is thankful because “your faith is proclaimed in all the world” (Rom 1:8), and he writes to the Thessalonians, “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere” (1 Thess 1:8). The fact that the churches’ “faith” has been “proclaimed” and “gone forth” does not necessarily imply any evangelistic endeavors by the respective churches, but only a word-of-mouth spreading by others of the Thessalonians’ conversion and faith in Christ.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the ESV’s translation takes a minority position and

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<sup>8</sup> Schnabel, *Early Christian Missions*, 2:1452.

<sup>9</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:75; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 105–07; Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans*, Geneva Series Commentary (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 24; Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1990), 83.

changes the Greek word-order of two phrases, “not only” and “everywhere.” The NASB shows the better order of Paul’s logic: “For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth.” This rendering of the Greek indicates that the word of the Lord went everywhere that the testimony about the Thessalonian church went.<sup>10</sup> God used their testimony to spread the gospel, even though their testimony is not the gospel per se. Still, even if it does indicate that the church made concerted evangelistic endeavors in Macedonia and Achaia, it does not follow that (1) there is a command to do so or that (2) each individual in the church was commanded to evangelize. These passages cannot be construed to be a universal command to evangelize.

b. *Romans 10:14–15*. Here, Paul exalts the task of gospel proclamation by underscoring its absolute necessity for one to believe and call on the name of the Lord. He concludes with a quote of Isa 52:7: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom 10:15). While holding preachers in high regard, Paul in no way requires this task of all his people. To the contrary, he seems to indicate it is a special task reserved for only some of God’s people who are “sent” to preach. Dickson argues that Paul’s understanding of gospelizing is tightly connected to the Jewish, and especially Isaianic, context, where “gospel-heralding was the activity of divinely commissioned heralds of great eschatological import.”<sup>11</sup> We find no universal command to evangelize here,<sup>12</sup> and to the contrary, get a glimpse into the

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<sup>10</sup> Wannamaker says it this way: “[T]he word of the Lord has sounded out from you’ means little more than that the report of their faith went forth.” Wannamaker, *Thessalonians*, 83. This reading takes scruples with Cara’s understanding that the word of the Lord is “the preaching of the Thessalonians . . .” Robert J. Cara, *A Study Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2009), 45. However, even if Paul does commend the Thessalonians for their preaching going throughout the world, it does not follow that this is a prescriptive command for other churches.

<sup>11</sup> Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 159, 169–77.

<sup>12</sup> See Hodge, *Romans*, 346–46; Longenecker, *Romans*, 855.

nature of gospelizing, namely that it is not done by the masses, but is done by those commissioned for the task.

c. *2 Corinthians 5:20*. This is one of two places Paul uses the word “ambassadors” in connection with gospel proclamation. He writes here, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” The key to this passage is identifying the “we.” Is it Paul and his fellow laborers, is it Paul and his readers, or is it a generic or “royal” usage referring to Paul alone? Paul uses the first-person plural just before in verse 18 when he says God “entrust[ed] to us the ministry of reconciliation.” Paul exercises this ministry in the second half of 5:20 when he makes the ambassadorial appeal to the Corinthians, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Paul clearly makes a distinction between his readers and the first-person plural. So the “we” of 2 Cor 5:20 cannot be a reference to the Corinthians that exhorts them to proclaim the gospel as ambassadors.<sup>13</sup>

d. *Philippians 1:14–15*. Likely writing from a Roman prison, Paul here reports to the Philippians what is happening among the Christians near him: “And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.” “Most” of the Christians are speaking the word, even preaching it, and as a result, Paul rejoices (Phil 1:18). This sounds like evangelistic activity carried out by individuals.<sup>14</sup>

Descriptive accounts like this are informative and germane to our topic at hand, but we cannot

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<sup>13</sup> George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 311–15; Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 349–53.

<sup>14</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1991), 95; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, rev. ed., WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 44–45; John Reumann, *Philippians*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2008), 173–75.

draw a prescription from it, even if only because we would have a hard time determining which “most” part of our churches should be the ones engaging in this activity.

e. *Philippians 2:15–16*. Paul exhorts the church here, “[B]e blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life . . . .” There are really two points here: first, “shine as lights in the world.” This is a clear indication that the Christian’s life is to appear distinct from the world. Paul is possibly alluding to Jesus’ illustration in the Sermon on the Mount of his followers being “the light of the world” (Matt 5:14–16). Importantly, Jesus connects being a light simply to good works: “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). This passage seems to highlight good works instead of evangelistic activity on the part of individuals.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the passage brings up the debated participial form of the Greek verb, ἐπέχω. Does it mean “holding fast to” or “holding out” the word of life?<sup>16</sup> In other words, is the word of God something to be held tightly onto by the Philippians, or is it something to hold out and present to others? The latter would seem to indicate that there is a prescription of individual evangelism embedded in this text, while the former would not necessitate that conclusion. Scholars are deeply divided on the question with most, though not all, scholars engaged in biblical-theological studies opting for “hold forth,”<sup>17</sup> and most, though not all, scholars engaged

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<sup>15</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 292–96; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 144–146.

<sup>16</sup> “ἐπέχω,” BDAG 362.

<sup>17</sup> Ware, *Paul and the Mission of the Church*, 256–70; Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission*, 74–77; Marvin R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 69–70.



in writing commentaries opting for “hold fast.”<sup>18</sup> Space prevents a complete evaluation of the debate, but we will make two observations. First, O’Brien, a proponent of an every-member-evangelism model, concedes that the word can only mean “hold fast” in this context.<sup>19</sup> Second, as Bowers points out, the immediate context indicates that “hold fast” is preferred.<sup>20</sup> The phrase following Paul’s instruction to hold fast is “so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (Phil 2:16). Paul would have run in vain if the Philippians did not hold fast to the word of life, turning away from it. If they merely do not “hold forth” the word of life, that does not mean that Paul would have labored in vain. So, we will opt for the reading “hold fast” to the word of life, though our level of exegetical certainty is not high enough for this to be considered an open-and-shut case.

f. *Colossians 4:5–6*. This is a very important text wherein Paul instructs the Colossians how to live among unbelievers: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Both actions and words are highlighted here. The actions referred to are general and refer to the Christian’s intentional living before unbelievers. The speech is especially connected with answering unbelief. That is the unique contribution of this text: it highlights speech that answers unbelievers’ objections and protests to the faith. It is not unlike Peter’s similar exhortation often used as a proof-text for the Christian apologetic

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<sup>18</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 146; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 297; Riemann, *Philippians*, 393–94; Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 108–110; O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 118–19; Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 194; Bowers, “Church and Mission in Paul,” 100–101; Vern Sheridan Poythress, “‘Hold Fast’ Versus ‘Hold Out’ in Philippians 2:16,” *WTJ* 63 (2002), 45–53; “ἐπέχω,” BDAG 362.

<sup>19</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 297; O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 118–19; Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 194.

<sup>20</sup> Bowers, “Church and Mission in Paul,” 100–101

endeavor (1 Pet 3:15). In Colossians, Paul highlights the Christian's ability to respond, or be defensive, not the Christian's obligation to be offensive in evangelism. Christians are to exercise wisdom in their relations with unbelievers, knowing there is an antithetical spiritual difference between them, attempting to be winsome and attractive with their speech, even if responding to slander and hatred.<sup>21</sup>

None of these texts prove Paul's theology includes a command for individual evangelism. Thus, scholars' similar conclusions are warranted from the Biblical text, and we can now consider potential ways forward.

2. *Four possible ways forward.* What then can we learn from Paul regarding individual evangelism? Kent L. Yinger provides a taxonomy of potential options.<sup>22</sup> With some revision, these options are (1) reject, de-emphasize, or redefine world evangelization; (2) invoke progressive interpretation (or revelation); (3) limit evangelism to apostolic or other offices; or (4) see an implied commitment to individual evangelism in Paul. Of these options, (1) runs contrary to the mission Christ gave to the church in Matthew 28 (even if, *arguendo*, that option is not contrary to a *prima facie* reading of Paul), and (2) is contrary to our orthodox, Reformed convictions springing from the self-authenticating nature of Divine revelation;<sup>23</sup> these two options should be rejected out of hand.

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<sup>21</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1996), 264–68; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 174–75.

<sup>22</sup> Kent L. Yinger, "Paul and Evangelism: A Missiological Challenge from New Testament Studies." *Missiology* 37 (2009): 390–93.

<sup>23</sup> See WCF 1.

Evangelical scholars line up on both sides of the remaining two positions.<sup>24</sup> Some tend toward limiting targeted evangelistic activity to apostles and others called to the particular task. In this line, Paul Bowers says that evangelism is “a function of certain believers, individually or collectively, but not corporately.”<sup>25</sup> But that does not mean the individual has no role to play, as Bosch argues, because “[the] primary responsibility of ‘ordinary’ Christians is not to go out and preach, but to support the mission project through their appealing conduct and by making ‘outsiders’ feel welcome in their midst.”<sup>26</sup>

On the other side, many see that Paul impliedly teaches that all believers should have a personal evangelistic commitment. For example, O’Brien argues that Christians today should have a “deeper commitment to [the gospel’s] ongoing, powerful advance, as well as to the person at its centre, Jesus Christ, God’s Son,”<sup>27</sup> and Ware sees, especially in Philippians, that “the obligation of believers to hold forth the world of life is presupposed in common by both Paul and his churches” because “a mission to spread the gospel as at the core of their identity as followers of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> Each and every Christian is thus called to preach and spread the gospel

So, due to the lack of command in Paul, some tend to gravitate to the weight Paul puts on the apostolic and ordained offices in the life of the church in carrying out its mission to evangelize. Others emphasize that all Christians have a mandate to be personally engaged in

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<sup>24</sup> For another treatment of these two positions, see Mark J. Keown, “Congregational Evangelism in Paul: The Paul of Acts.” *Colloquium* 42 (2010): 231–32.

<sup>25</sup> Bowers, “Church and Mission in Paul,” 103.

<sup>26</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Missions*, 138.

<sup>27</sup> O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul*, 136,

<sup>28</sup> Ware, *Paul and the Mission of the Church*, 289–90.

evangelism.<sup>29</sup> Both of these sides have important points that should be considered very carefully, and the next two sections will attempt to keep the best and biblical portions of both sides in view as we build a case in favor of our thesis.

## II. PREACHING THE GOSPEL IS RESERVED FOR PAUL, APOSTLES, AND OTHERS GIFTED BY THE SPIRIT

Here we want to begin to understand who is responsible for preaching. Paul uses a particular Greek word to consistently refer to that activity, so we will first look into the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον and its cognates. Second, we will consider who is charged with the task of preaching the gospel, then, third, we will look at how God has given spiritual gifts that make some specially equipped to evangelize, though not in an official capacity.

1. *Εὐαγγέλιον and Paul's use thereof.* The Greek word εὐαγγέλιον is extremely important for our inquiry. It is a compound of εὖ (“good”) and ἄγγελος (“messenger”).<sup>30</sup> Its noun form comes into English simply as “good news” or “gospel,” and it can be the object of various verbs (εὐαγγελίζω [e.g., 2 Cor 11:7], κηρύσσω [e.g., Gal 2:2], καταγγέλλω [e.g., 1 Cor 9:14], and λαλέω [e.g., 1 Thess 2:2]).<sup>31</sup> The εὐαγγέλιον is proclaimed, and Paul often describes this act of proclamation by using the verbal cognate form of the word, εὐαγγελίζω (e.g., 1 Cor

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<sup>29</sup> Some would argue for this on the basis of other biblical texts, but most notably the Great Commission given by Christ in Matt 28. It is beyond the scope of this paper to treat the topic in any real depth, but it must suffice to say that the Great Commission has historically been interpreted in such a way as to apply either only to the disciples and apostles themselves or to apply to them and the church, generally, as an institution and embodiment of Christ's own teaching and preaching. See John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew Mark, and Luke*, 3 vols., trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 3:383–87; George R. Hunsberger, “Is There Biblical Warrant for Evangelism?” in *The Study of Evangelism*, ed. Paul Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 62.

<sup>30</sup> “εὐαγγέλιον,” NIDNTTE 2:306.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 2:310.

1:17). This word literally means to “gospelize,” to announce the gospel.<sup>32</sup> The verbal form of the Greek was transliterated into Latin as “ēvangelizāre” and then into English as “evangelize.”<sup>33</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines “evangelize” very closely to the literal etymological meaning of εὐαγγελίζω: “to bring or tell good tidings” or “to preach, proclaim the Gospel.”<sup>34</sup> But it is important to note that the Greek does not limit the preaching of the gospel particularly to the unregenerate; it applies to all gospel preaching, both to believers and unbelievers.

In Paul, this gospel is something that is verbally preached.<sup>35</sup> The content of the gospel is God’s gracious revelation through the person and work of Jesus (1 Cor 15:3–4), and the gospel itself “is the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16). It is not a message from man (Gal 1:11) but from God, and God entrusted the message to the apostles for proclamation among the Jews and Gentiles (Gal 2:7). For Paul, the act of gospelizing is closely connected to a special authority given by God, as we have mentioned above.<sup>36</sup> A particular grace was given him to enable and authorize him to gospelize (Eph 3:8). According to Paul’s usage, a gospelizer cannot be anybody in the Christian community, but it is one who has been specially authorized to proclaim the gospel.

2. *Offices charged with preaching the gospel.* Paul refers to many others who preach the gospel; it is not simply an enterprise that he solitarily engages in. So who else does Paul

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<sup>32</sup> See “εὐαγγελίζω,” BDAG 402.

<sup>33</sup> “evangelize, v.” OED Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, March 2018), <http://www.oed.com.bunchproxy.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/65209?redirectedFrom=evangelize&> (accessed April 18, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “εὐαγγέλιον,” NIDNTTE 2:312.

<sup>36</sup> Dickinson, *Mission-Commitment*, 176–77.

consider to be a gospelizer with him? There are both extraordinary and ordinary offices that are called to the task.

First, we see Apostles are co-preachers with Paul: “apostleship and the preaching of the gospel belong together.”<sup>37</sup> The calling as apostle, preacher, and teacher are tightly bound up with the gospel itself, as indicated when he says, “the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher . . .” (2 Tim 1:10–11; see 1 Tim 2:7). Paul specifically says that “Peter had been entrusted with the gospel” in a way comparable to himself, only with a focus on the Jews (Gal 2:7). Paul went to Thessalonica with at least one other apostle before writing to them (1 Thess 2:6), and the gospel was proclaimed and converted many in the church (1:5). This is sufficient to note that the work of gospelizing belongs to the office of apostle. Further, the apostolic office was foundational in the establishment of the church (Eph 2:20) and does not continue today.<sup>38</sup>

Second, this work belongs to evangelists, too. One other cognate of εὐαγγέλιον is important: εὐαγγελιστής, an “evangelist,” one who gospelizes. It is the very nature of an evangelist to preach the gospel.<sup>39</sup> Paul uses this form of the word twice, once in an exhortation to Timothy in 2 Tim 4:5 (“do the work of an evangelist”) and once in Eph 4:11 as he lists various offices and gifts Christ has given to the church (“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers”). The Greek word εὐαγγελιστής does not have only a

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<sup>37</sup> “εὐαγγέλιον,” NIDNTTE 2:311. See also Mk 3:14: “And [Jesus] appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach . . .”

<sup>38</sup> See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 448–50; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 4:333–340; Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin, 5 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–2016), 5:50–54.

<sup>39</sup> See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:335–36.

narrow reference to gospel-proclamation to unbelievers (as it has come to have in its English transliteration)—it encompasses gospel-proclaiming to and building up of believers, too.<sup>40</sup> These evangelists “are connected with the apostles. They were their associates, traveling companions, fellow workers.”<sup>41</sup> They were tasked with ordinary pastoral obligations in addition to special powers to do extraordinary ecclesiastical functions such as appointing elders (Titus 1:5), exercising discipline (3:10), and laying on hands (1 Tim 5:22).<sup>42</sup> This office, as such, belongs to the extraordinary category and does not exist today in the same way; as Ridderbos concludes, “With the dying out of the apostles the evangelists disappear as well.”<sup>43</sup>

Third, pastors<sup>44</sup> are charged with the task of preaching, the ministry of the word.<sup>45</sup> As Paul charged Timothy, preachers are to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). Similarly, Paul instructs that all elders must “be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). While this kind of teaching does differ from gospel proclamation,<sup>46</sup> they are not unrelated. It complements gospelizing (though indicating there is something distinctive about gospel proclamation vis-à-vis teaching), is connected to the elders’ ruling function in the church, and is practically used by God to bring about faith in some

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<sup>40</sup> D. A. Carson, “Do the Work of an Evangelist,” *Themelios* 39.1 (2014): 2–3.

<sup>41</sup> Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:54.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, 454; see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:335–36. While not committing either way, Vos is not so sure the office is completely gone, evidenced when he says, “If this office of evangelist can still exist, there is much more reason to place them higher [than pastors].” Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:55.

<sup>44</sup> Without wading into the merits in the debate over two- or three-office views, these pastors are either an office of their own or a particular type of elder. However, Vos is right in his assessment, “From 1 Timothy 5:17 it appears further that there were elders who worked in the Word and teaching, and so also elders who were not occupied with such work. The distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders rests on that.” *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:56. Thus, Pastors are equivalent to Vos’s (and some NAPARC denominations’) teaching elders.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 5:59; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:344–45.

<sup>46</sup> Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:60–61.

situations. The fact that pastors are called to this task of preaching the gospel demonstrates their central role today in gospelizing and evangelism, now that the extraordinary offices have ceased.

3. *Spiritual gifts and preaching the gospel.* Jesus has given gifts to each member of the church for the purpose of serving the church (Rom 12:3–8). While all ordained offices require a recognition of at least a minimum gifting for that office, all members have gifts whether they hold an office or not. Paul lists two gifts that relate to gospelizing in Rom 12:7–8, teaching and exhortation, and Charles Hodge explains,

Teaching is addressed to the understanding; exhortation, to the conscience and feelings. There was probably no distinct class of officers called exhorters, as distinguished from teachers; but as the apostle is speaking of gifts as well as officers, (both are included in the word *χαρίσματα*.) his direction is, that he who had the gift of teaching, should teach; and that he who had a gift for exhortation, should be content to exhort.<sup>47</sup>

There are those gifted with teaching and exhortation in the church that may not be called to an office. They should nevertheless use these gifts, as Paul urges: “Let us use [our gifts]” (Rom 12:6). Those who have the gifts and do not use them should be admonished, for they are in sin. Therefore, those in the church, regardless of office, who have the gift of teaching and especially of exhortation, should use those gifts in the furtherance of evangelistic efforts in the life of the church. Demonstrating this principle, Dickson highlights that some in Paul’s congregations (such as Epaphroditus) were commissioned delegates of the local congregation, and there were some that engaged in intentional evangelism in other cities, but especially locally.<sup>48</sup> This kind of

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<sup>47</sup> Hodge, *Romans*, 392.

<sup>48</sup> Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 133–52.



gospel-proclaiming is not the “official” gospelizing that Paul speaks of, but it is a verbal, intentional kind of evangelism that is congruent with the way evangelism is thought of in many churches today. These gifted persons should serve as full time “evangelists” (not in the authorized gospelizing sense, but in the more general sense defined previously in this paper) and missionaries as circumstances permit.

This section has argued that there are certain persons called to preach the gospel and to evangelize. In the foundational era of the church, apostles and evangelists primarily had this task. But Paul’s apostolic witness left the church today with pastors who carry on this gospel-proclaiming task in an official capacity. Nevertheless, Christ has gifted others in the church with abilities to teach and exhort, and those who are gifted in evangelism should not waste Christ’s gifts to them. So today, both there are certain officers and non-officers who are called to evangelize. Much of this is consistent with Yinger’s category, “limit evangelism to apostolic or other offices,” but does expand it somewhat, namely, that evangelism is also an affirmative call for certain people gifted for the task who do not hold an office in the church. We would simply add that it is not merely an office that designates one’s call, but one’s giftings that designates whether one must engage in evangelism. However, we will transcend this category further as we continue to consider Paul’s theology, below.

### III. ALL CHRISTIANS’ ROLE IN EVANGELISM

These observations so far have led some to indicate that the “ordinary” Christian has no role in evangelism. Some could caricature Paul Bowers in such a way by lifting a single sentence out of his larger argument, “Mission was apparently for [Paul] a function of certain believers,

individually or collectively, but not corporately.”<sup>49</sup> But it could not be further from the truth. Individuals are a part of evangelism in a variety of ways, and scripture certainly does not hinder evangelistic activity in any way. Dickson’s thesis includes a helpful distinction between those who are gospel-proclaimers and those who are gospel-promoters.<sup>50</sup> As we argue here, all Christians must be gospel-promoters.

1. *Prayer and finances.* Paul requests prayers from the church in Thessalonica as active assistance to his evangelistic endeavors: “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you” (2 Thess 3:1; see Rom 15:30–32; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 3:1–2). Additionally, Paul expects financial assistance from the churches, such as the Roman church, when he says, “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while (Rom 15:24).”<sup>51</sup> Thus, all Christians thus are to pray for evangelistic activity of the gospelizers and assist financially with the work as they are able.<sup>52</sup>

2. *Love.* The natural outflow of the fruit of the Spirit is to love, and love will create evangelistic desire. As J. I. Packer points out, “There are, in fact, two motives for what should spur us constantly to evangelize. The first is love of God and concern for his glory; the second is love of man and concern for his welfare.”<sup>53</sup> In dramatic fashion, Paul writes how he wished he could be accursed if that meant his fellow Jews would repent and believe—he was full of “great sorrow and unceasing anguish in [his] heart” over the matter (Rom 9:1–5). He finds points of

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<sup>49</sup> Bowers, “Church and Mission in Paul,” 103.

<sup>50</sup> Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 311.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*, 101–102; Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 214–27.

<sup>52</sup> See Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 178–213.

<sup>53</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 74.

contact to relate to both Jews and Gentiles, “that by all means [he] might save some” (1 Cor 9:19–22). His sacrifices are “all for the sake of the gospel” (1 Cor 9:23). He is entrusted with a message of life, and he eagerly desires to share it—to evangelize—so that others would know Christ. This is the kind of love that Christians will have when they love God and love nonbelievers.

Furthermore, Packer says, “It is the nature of love to be enterprising.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, one cannot say he loves his neighbor and desires to see him know Christ without doing something—anything—to see that accomplished. Christians should be enterprising in finding ways to show our neighbors Christ: “It must never be forgotten that the enterprise required of us in evangelism is the enterprise of love: an enterprise that springs from a genuine interest in those whom we seek to win, and a genuine care for their well-being, and expresses itself in a genuine respect for them and a genuine friendliness toward them.”<sup>55</sup> This does not mean that every Christian is called to evangelize in the same way or to the same extent, but simply that out of love for God and neighbor, a natural enterprising will result. When Keown says, “Paul envisaged his converts proactively sharing the message with their unbelieving neighbours,”<sup>56</sup> he is not precisely right because some enterprising Christians might not end up personally evangelizing, but he is not far off from what Paul expects.<sup>57</sup>

3. *Attraction through good works.* Another area of focus in Paul’s thought is attraction of nonbelievers to the church through good works.<sup>58</sup> Paul is very concerned that every believer

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>56</sup> Keown, “Congregational Evangelism in Paul,” 251.

<sup>57</sup> He may even be stating the presumptive position for all believers that, given circumstances in some individuals’ lives, could be somewhat altered. In other words, it is the aspiration of all, and the attainment of most.

<sup>58</sup> Dickson, *Mission-Commitment*, 262–92.

will live righteously before a watching world. He knows that they should not “go out of the world,” so they will necessarily associate with “the sexually immoral of this world” and “the greedy and swindlers,” and “idolaters” (1 Cor 5:10). In this light, believers are not to take lawsuits before unbelievers (6:1–8). It is shameful to do so, and it is better to have other believers judge disputes among believers. While this is due in part to the facts that Christians “will judge the world” (6:2), Paul also seems to indicate it has to do with the Christians’ witness before unbelievers. Even more, Paul is concerned that the Christians “give no offense” to any unbeliever (10:32). While it is generally acceptable for Christians to eat meat offered to idols, they are not to do so if their unbelieving host tells them it has been offered to an idol “for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his” (10:28–29). Paul here is concerned that it might send the wrong message to the unbelievers if they eat meat offered to idols.

Paul repeats this theme in Philippians: “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God” (1:27–28). In 2:15, as discussed above, Paul exhorts everyone in the church to “shine as lights in the world.” Colossians 4:5-6, also discussed above, comes into focus here, commanding each Christian to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders” and to always have gracious speech. Other passages with the same concern include 1 Timothy 3:17 and 6:1.

The net effect here is that, in Garland’s words, “Great importance, therefore, was attached to the conduct of Christians as an essential component of their witness to the world,

their evangelism.”<sup>59</sup> Schnabel summarizes similarly, “[T]he believers’ conversations and lifestyle in everyday situations will contribute to and support God’s desire that more Jews and more Gentiles hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, accept it by faith and join the church, which thus continues to grow.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, a premium is placed on the works and deeds of each and every Christian, and these will attract unbelievers to the church to hear the gospel proclaimed. This is not evangelism per se (because it entails no actual proclaiming of the gospel), but it is nonetheless important to begin establishing relationships with and drawing in unbelievers.

4. *Imitation of Paul.* Another vast area of Pauline theology is his “imitation theology,”<sup>61</sup> which comes to bear on evangelism. As Paul exhorts the churches to be imitators of him (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:7; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:7; 3:9), the question invariably arises, to what extent are Christians to imitate Paul? Certainly Paul does not intend his readers to imitate him in his apostolic functions.<sup>62</sup> But even if we accept O’Brien’s conclusion that the Corinthians were “expected . . . to be committed to evangelism just as [Paul] was” because his “goal of *saving many* was an essential element in the servant pattern he adopted . . . and should have been the Corinthians’ objective as well as his own,”<sup>63</sup> it does not follow that they are to play the same role in evangelism that Paul does. Even if their commitment to evangelism should be comparable to that of Paul, “Paul is not suggesting that they should engage in the same wide-ranging, apostolic ministry in which he has been involved; but each *in his or her own way and*

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<sup>59</sup> David E. Garland, “Evangelism in the New Testament,” *RevExp* 77 (1980): 469.

<sup>60</sup> Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1485.

<sup>61</sup> See S. E. Fowl, “Imitation of Paul/of Christ” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 428–31.

<sup>62</sup> Bowers, “Church and Mission in Paul,” 93; Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 196.

<sup>63</sup> O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 107; see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1454.

*according to their personal gifts* was to have the same orientation and ambitions as Paul himself, that is, of seeking by all possible means to save some.”<sup>64</sup>

While space prevents exploration of other themes that may lead to a richer understanding of how individuals should be involved in evangelism,<sup>65</sup> these four areas will suffice to demonstrate that all believers are called to be involved in evangelism to some extent. At the very least, they are to pray and contribute financially to evangelistic efforts as they have the resources. But all Christians, loving God and their neighbor as a result of a regenerated heart, will be enterprising in finding ways that the gospel can be taken to those without it. No matter how the Christian does this, their good works should nevertheless make Christianity attractive to unbelievers, that they might draw near to the church. Paul provides a positive example that Christians should imitate in his commitment to seeing evangelism going forward. All Christians have a role to play in evangelism, namely in promoting the gospel in their everyday lives.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Paul makes no explicit command that individual Christians should evangelize. This stunning absence in Paul’s theology leads to one of four conclusions according to Yinger, two of which we considered reasonable and worthy of further investigation: either evangelism is limited to apostolic or other offices, or there is an implied commitment to individual evangelism in Paul. Both of these strands come together and have important things to say for Paul’s theology of individual evangelism.

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<sup>64</sup> Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 196.

<sup>65</sup> E.g., parts of the “armor of God” in Ephesians 6, the meaning of the Philippians’ “partnership in the gospel” in Philippians 4:15, and what O’Brien calls “The Logic of Paul’s Gospel.” O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 53–77.

First, Paul highlights the important role that the offices of apostle, evangelist, and pastor play in gospel-proclaiming and evangelizing. To think that missions and evangelism is merely a spontaneous work of the laity alone is wrong-headed. Additionally, there are some who are not called to be office-bearers in the church who nevertheless have gifts in teaching and exhortation that lead to effective evangelization (though in a subordinate but supplemental way to the official preaching and teaching of the church). God calls these individuals to engage in evangelism in a conscious, intentional way, even possibly as a full-time vocation.

Second, Paul does not leave the rest of the laity without a role in evangelism, even if they do not engage in personal evangelism on a regular basis. They are all to be gospel-promoters. They pray and give financially to the efforts. They love their neighbors and seek ways to share the gospel with them. They live lives that are different from the world, attracting nonbelievers to the church. They have a zeal for seeing unbelievers come to know Christ, like Paul. And as they grasp the gospel in all of its riches, they simply cannot keep it to themselves. In all, evangelism is not merely reserved for a select few who are gifted at it. Each member of the church has a role to play in the whole evangelism enterprise.

The beauty of Paul's theology of evangelism is that it makes great use of the varied gifts among all Christians in the church. Those with gifts of teaching and exhorting must use their gifts. Those with gifts of hospitality must use those gifts. Herein is a call for Christians to examine their gifts and use them. It is easy to make excuses for why one is not exercising their gifts in the church, but it is sinful to do so. The enterprising Christians will use his gifts for the good of the church, and part of that is to seek its expansion through evangelism.

At the same time, this theology makes room for those who have situational hinderances that prevent them from gospel-proclaiming and gospel-promoting to the extent that others are doing. Mothers with young children do not have the same time to spend with inquiring non-believers that an empty-nester might have (though she does have unique connections to other mothers with young children). Those who are infirmed cannot actively promote the way a healthy church member might (though he does have access to other infirmed or medical professions where he can gospel-promote in a way other Christians cannot). Each person's situation is taken into account to determine how he can best proclaim or promote the gospel. Each person has different gifts, different situational callings, and thus different avenues to serve.

For pastors today, as ordained gospel-proclaimers, this is a reminder that they have no excuse for not being better at evangelism, and along with Paul should set an example for what a love for the lost looks like. It is part of their call as ordained, office-bearing gospelizers to bring the gospel to the unregenerate. Their individual giftings will determine whether this becomes a primary component in their ministry or not, but it nevertheless is part of their calling to preach the gospel. They should seek to cultivate the gifts that lead to effective evangelism.

For all Christians today, two strands of gospel-promotion here should be highlighted. First is the role that lifestyle plays. Christians will look different from the world. Not only will they exhibit the fruit of the spirit, but they will observe the Lord's Day, not engage in debauchery and drunkenness, and be a contrast to the way of the world. We cannot underscore how much this kind of witness is important in promoting the gospel. While the quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi ("Preach the gospel always, and when necessary,



use words”) grossly distorts what the gospel is, the sentiments behind it are true. Christians’ actions are always on display before the world, and we must think very carefully about how our witness is seen by others, careful to not give an appearance of licentiousness or legalism, but living purely before God and the world. Additionally, there will be times where we will necessary bear witness to the gospel with our words. This will be a natural consequence of our living, but we should also look for these opportunities.

A second strand that should be emphasized for Christians today is that we should be prepared to answer the questions asked of us, as Colossians 4:5 exhorts us: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Christians should prepare themselves for these kinds of apologetic conversations that will come our way that will include some measure of explaining the gospel. To the extent that we consider this evangelism, evangelism is a call of all Christians. We should not shrink back from these opportunities, but see them as from the hand of God, using us in his sovereign plans for salvation of the world.

To conclude, Paul’s theology of evangelism distinguishes between gospel-proclaimers and gospel-promoters. As Yinger explains, “This model provides a Pauline mandate to a full-orbed mission-commitment by every believer and congregation, but stops just short of laying upon every believer a mandate to be personally engaged in verbally propagating the gospel.”<sup>66</sup> Churches should take extreme care to not lay the law of evangelism at the feet of every Christian, as many churches with good intentions do. However, it should be noted that there is no prohibition for all Christians to be engaged in intentional individual personal evangelism.

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<sup>66</sup> Yinger, “Paul and Evangelism,” 393.

This should be a natural desire for Christians as a result of being changed by the gospel, but countervailing interests such as fear and time resources often impede their efforts. Here, training of all sorts can be helpful. There are books, seminars, and evangelism/outreach courses dedicated to this purpose that can be very beneficial in building up the church. But pastors, as the authorized gospel-proclaimers, must take up the mantle of evangelism and show their congregations what it looks like to be a faithful witness to a watching world.