

The Church: A Congregation's Ministers

Why do congregations today have located ministers?

- It is noteworthy that **many of the most prominent ministers in the New Testament were not located in one place** or ministering to one congregation in particular:
 - **Jesus Himself** traveled from place to place throughout His ministry (Matthew 4:23-25, Luke 13:22, John 4:4-5, etc).
 - **The apostle Peter** traveled throughout Judea and Samaria in the earliest years of the church's existence (Acts 8:14ff, 9:32-43, 10:9ff).
 - **The apostle Paul** made four great missionary journeys (that we know of) in his lifetime, covering much of the vast Roman Empire (the histories of these four journeys are the main focus of Acts 13-28).
- However, it is also the case that **there were ministers in the first century who operated primarily in one city** and ministered primarily to one congregation
 - **James, the brother of Jesus**, is seen as a consistent minister and leader within the congregation of Jerusalem in the first century (Acts 15:13ff, 21:17-18).
 - **Timothy, Paul's "son in the faith,"** was apparently a local minister to the church in Ephesus for an extended period (1 Timothy 1:3ff, 2 Timothy 1:16-18).
 - **Titus, another of Paul's students**, was placed on the island of Crete by Paul as a minister for the purpose of strengthening the church there (Titus 1:5ff).
 - It is also true that some ministers fulfilled both roles in the first century; **Epaphroditus, who traveled with Paul at times**, also seems to have at least a semi-permanent ministry role with the church in Philippi (Philippians 2:25-30).
- Overall, the decision to hire local ministers and/or support traveling missionaries is **made on a congregational level** and lies under the oversight of the congregation's eldership.

What does the Bible say about the located minister's role in the church?

- Much of what we know about the work of the located minister comes from the so-called pastoral epistles of Paul. These letters, written to Timothy and Titus, provide insight into the work of the located minister within a congregational setting:
 - **Paul's first letter to Timothy emphasizes the role of the minister as a defender of the church** against the false teachings and temptations of the world

(1 Timothy 1:1-11, 6:3-10). Ministers play a vital role in encouraging the congregation towards prayer and service (1 Timothy 2:1-7, 5:1-6:2), supporting the God-given plan for the church (1 Timothy 3:1-16), and continuing to preach sound doctrine even when it is unpopular (1 Timothy 2:8-15, 4:1-5). Their ability to accomplish these tasks must be based in humility and faith, resulting from a sincere confession of the Gospel of Christ and genuine devotion to Him as Lord and Leader of the church (1 Timothy 1:12-20, 4:6-16, 6:11-21).

- **Paul's second letter to Timothy focuses on the duty of the minister to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth** (2 Timothy 2:14-19, 4:1-5). Being strengthened by the examples of Christ and of faithful men and women of the past (2 Timothy 1:1-18, 4:6-22), the minister must be strong in the faith and protect it at all costs (2 Timothy 2:1-13 and 20-26). This includes the ability to recognize and differentiate between the futile desires and opinions of the world (2 Timothy 3:1-9) as opposed to the inspired and unchanging truths of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:10-17), which implies both the necessity of scriptural study and the necessity of courage to stand up for what is right when opposed.
- **Paul's letter to Titus illustrates the direct correlation between the teaching of sound doctrine and the edification of the church body** (Titus 2:1-10). Through this letter, Paul asserts that a strong church leadership is important to overcoming congregational issues of impurity and weakness (Titus 1:1-16), and that an attitude of humility and sober-mindedness that reflects the truth of the Gospel is the key to encouraging unity and good works (Titus 3:1-15). The minister plays a vital role in these processes, and in order for his ministry to have these positive impacts, the Gospel of Christ must be its cornerstone, as it is the cornerstone of the congregation as a whole (Titus 2:11-15).

How does this line up with common misunderstandings of the located minister's role in the church?

- In the modern age, there are many **misconceptions** about the role of ministers within their congregations. Here are some of the most common, and their biblical answers:
 1. **The minister is the leader of the congregation** - The only Leader of the church is Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 28:18, Colossians 1:15-20), while the New Testament's chain of divine authority grants limited oversight of the congregation to its eldership (Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 1:7-8; Acts 14:21-23, Titus 1:5ff).

2. **The minister is the pastor/shepherd of the congregational flock** - In addition to being its overseers, the elders of a congregation are its pastors/shepherds, tasked with pastoral care and spiritual nourishment of the congregation's members (Acts 20:28-29, 1 Peter 5:1-4).
3. **The minister is the primary evangelist of the congregation** - While ministers should be involved in personal and congregational evangelism, it is the duty of every Christian to share the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 10:14-17).
4. **The minister is the primary leader of the congregation's service efforts** - Just as every Christian, including ministers, has a necessary role in evangelism, so too does every Christian, including ministers, have an obligation to serve others and to be involved in the church's efforts to do the same (Matthew 25:31-46, 1 Corinthians 12-13, Galatians 6:1-10).
5. **The minister must be a husband and father** - There are no such familial obligations placed upon ministers - Jesus and Paul, among others, were single men - though Paul notes that for some Christians, including ministers, married life may be an easier lifestyle in order to avoid temptation (1 Corinthians 7:1-9).
6. **The minister must always fulfill a prominent role within congregational worship settings** - Ministers, like all Christians, should certainly participate in congregational worship as part of their faithfulness to the Lord's church (Hebrews 10:19-25). It is also sensible that ministers should be comfortable in worship and leadership settings as those appointed to a special role of congregational service (2 Timothy 2:1-2). That said, the participation of a minister in specific areas of leadership during every worship service is never presented as a binding commandment in the New Testament.
7. **The minister is held to a holier standard than other Christians** - In a sense, ministers are held to a higher standard of knowledge, as the responsibility of spiritual training and teaching includes the necessity of study in order to maintain doctrinal soundness (2 Timothy 2:15, James 3:1). However, the commandments and examples of the New Testament are not any more binding to ministers - or their families - than they are to others. All members of Christ's church are called to lives of holiness which reflect His character and the impact of His Gospel (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Peter 1:13-21).

Want to learn more? We would love to study with you! valleybiblestudies@gmail.com
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