

The Responsibilities of A Good Shepherd

by Sandy Simpson, 5/20/05

There was a good reason why the illustration of a shepherd with his sheep was used so often in biblical times ... because it was an illustration people could easily identify with in their cultural context. The illustrations we use are most effective when they are understood easily by the culture to which God has sent us to minister. Middle Eastern cultures understood what shepherding was all about. It was about feeding the lambs and the sheep, bringing them to good pasture lands and water, grooming and clipping them, delivering new lambs, leading them and teaching them to stay together, going off after the wandering lost ones, and protecting the sheep in the field and in the fold. We are all under shepherds and Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. We need to emulate what the Good Shepherd does for the sheep.

John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep".

There are many other aspects of this deep passage I could dwell on such as the Lord's use of the word "agape" and Peter's use of the word "phileo", or the paralleling of the three denials with Peter with the three commands of Jesus ... but I want to look at the three statements of Christ and think about the excellent illustration of shepherding by the Shepherd Who is showing us how to be good under shepherds.

Feeding

First Jesus says "feed my lambs." Emulating the foundational apostles such as Peter, we are told to feed the lambs. Lambs need milk. They need the basics of the Gospel and simple biblical precepts to grow. We are then to "take care of the sheep". That means we are to do everything I will get into in a moment. Finally we are to "feed my sheep". Remember, these are the sheep of the Lord, not our sheep. We are caretakers of sheep that belong to the Master. The point is we are to move beyond feeding the lambs milk to feeding the sheep solid food.

*Heb. 5:12-14 & 6:1-3 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! **Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves***

to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.

What then is solid food? It is training in righteousness so that the sheep can be fully equipped, able to stand in the day of testing.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Stories, pop psychology and worldly methodology do not feed sheep. They must be fed on the written Word of God as it is exegeted properly and applied by the Holy Spirit.

Watering

Genesis 29:3 When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

Water, in the Bible, is often used as an allusion to the Holy Spirit. It certainly is in the case of water baptism. An under shepherd will lead his flock to water regularly. He will roll away the stone of hard hearts and prepare those hearts to be receptive to the nourishment of the Holy Spirit. This can only be accomplished by rolling away the stone of the "self" culture so the light of God's written Word can shine through teaching and proper exegesis, through prayer, and living in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ.

Grooming

A shepherd grooms his sheep, keeps them clean and free of contamination from the world, the flesh and the devil. He then prepares them to be disciples, followers of the Good Shepherd, so they will, in turn, go out and minister to others.

Matt. 28:19-20 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."

Shearing

Duet. 18:4-5 You are to give them the firstfruits of your grain, new wine and oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep, for the LORD your God has chosen them and their descendants out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the LORD's name always.

At times sheep must be sheared. This is a useful and profitable process for both the sheep and the shepherd. This is an offering to the Good Shepherd. For the benefit of all, the sheep must be sheared ... disciplined, encouraged and rebuked ... to keep them fit for service to the Lord.

2 Tim.4:2-5 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage— with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them

a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, **keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.**

Heb. 12:7-11 **Endure hardship as discipline;** God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.**

1 Thessalonians 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, **warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**

Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. **Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.**

Delivering Lambs

Isaiah 40:11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: **He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.**

We are to deliver the lambs. We preach the Gospel, the Holy Spirit then convicts the sinner, and if some repent and believe they can be born again.

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

Only the Lord Jesus Christ can save and cause a person to be born again. But when a lamb is newly born, the under shepherd still has responsibilities.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;**

John 11:39-44 **"Take away the stone,"** he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, **"Take off the grave clothes and let him go."**

We roll the stone away by preaching the Gospel to let the light of the Son shine in the darkness. When a lamb is born, they come out wrapped in placenta. They still have the vestiges of the old man wrapped around them. They need to be helped to put off the old

man and put on the new lamb! This is called discipleship. Then when the lamb is relatively free, we let them go to grow on to maturity and live their faith out in action.

Leading

The under shepherd leads the flock in the world, while helping them not to be "of the world".

*Ps. 23:1-6 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. **He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.***

Following the lead of the Good Shepherd as under shepherds we are to lead the sheep to pasture and water. We teach them and restore them. We guide them in paths of righteousness. We protect them from wolves and beasts in the world with the rod and staff. The rod and staff are for discipline of the flock and protection for the flock.

*Proverbs 23:14 **Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.***

*1 Samuel 17:40 Then **he took his staff in his hand**, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.*

We are to discipline the sheep to be aware of the pitfalls of the world. We are to lead the flock out and teach them to stay together in unity. Sheep automatically have one type of unity, which they are to "keep".

*Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to **keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.***

The only way to be a sheep is to be born again. Otherwise you are a goat or a wolf. Those who are born again have a bond of peace, a unity of the Spirit. But there is another unity that we must build the sheep up into ... the unity of the Faith.

*Eph. 4:12-14 **to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.***

This unity is unity of belief, unity of doctrine. There is no way for sheep to be unified with wolves in sheep's clothing because there is no unity of the Faith.

*Matthew 10:16 **I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.***

Wolves are those who pretend to be in unity with the sheep just long enough to come in and drag sheep away into sin. They look and talk like sheep, but they expose who they are by their

fruits, false teaching and false prophecies. We need to teach the sheep to be shrewd and be on the watch for the pitfalls of the world, the flesh, the devil and of false religion.

Wandering Sheep

True under shepherds will make an effort to look for wandering sheep.

Luke 15:4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

The Bible is clear that many people have and will continue to wander from the Faith.

*1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. **Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.***

*1 Timothy 6:20-21 Timothy, **guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you.***

*James 5:19-20 My brothers, **if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.***

We need to help people who have wandered, fallen into the fire, while being careful not to get burned ourselves or soil our own clean clothes. This means we need to be careful about hanging out with false teachers and those who are deceived because we are also in danger of being deceived.

*Jude 1:22-23 **Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear— hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.***

We need to be mindful that we have all wandered at times, we have gone astray, but the point is to return to the Shepherd.

*1 Peter 2:25 **For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***

Protection

The shepherd would bring the flock home to the fold at night. He would then lay down in the gate physically to protect the sheep from wolves coming into the sheepfold. He literally put his life on the line for the sheep.

John 10:1-13 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the

shepherd of his sheep. **The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.**" Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, **"I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**

We learn some important things about being a good under shepherd in this passage. First of all we are to be watchmen. There are not only savage wolves out in the world, there are savage wolves who are entering the fold at an alarming rate.

Acts 20:29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

Matthew 7:15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

The wolves who try to enter the fold make themselves look like sheep. They talk like sheep, they pray like sheep, they make themselves look ultra-holy, they say "Lord, Lord", they claim to be doing miracles, casting out demons, making prophecies in the name of the Lord ... but by their fruit you will know them ... the fruit of lying, of false works, false prophecy, false teaching, false anointings, following false apostles, and trying to be justified by their works. The Shepherd sees through their ruse and calls them what they are ... evildoers.

Matt. 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

If we as under shepherds do not protect the flock against these wolves, we are just as liable for the destruction they cause under our watch as they are.

Ezekiel 33:6-7 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.' "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.

God has made every under shepherd a watchman. There are many gates into any church. The gate of the bookstore, the gate of the music ministry, the gate of the pulpit, the gate of the bulletin board advertising upcoming so-called "Christian" events, the gate of the women's

ministry, and the gate of people who come into the body but have an agenda to take people away from unity in the Faith. We need to lay our bodies down in the gate to protect the flock at the risk of our reputations, friendships, our livelihood, and perhaps even our lives. There are too many "hired hands" in the churches today who are not doing their job because they do not want to take a stand against anyone or anything. By their inability to make the hard stands they make themselves useless to the Good Shepherd, and allow great evil a foothold under their watch.

Conclusion

Those who are called to be servant under shepherds in the body of Christ must take that responsibility seriously. There are far too many who claim to be called to servant leadership, but demonstrate clearly that they are not qualified to be shepherds according to God's criteria. We need to be feeding the lambs and the sheep, bringing them to good pasture lands and water, grooming and clipping them, delivering new lambs, leading them and teaching them to stay together, going off after the wandering lost ones, and protecting the sheep in the field and in the fold.