

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

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Where Are The Shepherds of God's Sheep?

by Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

Throughout the Bible the concepts of shepherds and flocks are used to illustrate the relationship God the Shepherd has with His people, the sheep of His flock. Psalm 100:3 says, "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." Jesus stated, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10:11, 14).

The relationship of the shepherd with his sheep in the Bible is not like the sheep herding of our western states in this day. In Scripture there is a picture of friendship and intimacy where the shepherd knew his sheep by name (John 10:3-4). The best known Psalm in all the Bible is the 23rd Psalm, a shepherd and sheep relationship. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Then David, the shepherd boy who became king over Israel (1 Samuel 17), expresses how the Lord was his shepherd by caring for his needs of food, water, rest and safety (Psalm 23:1-6).

Additionally, shepherds in the Bible were leaders, they did not "drive" the sheep from behind. Christ noted, concerning shepherds, "the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and **leadeth them** out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, **he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him:** for they know his voice. And a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:3-5). It is this picture of the shepherd and sheep relationship that God intended when he appointed men to lead His people.

Shepherds - God's Appointed Leaders

When Moses knew he could not enter Canaan, he asked God to appoint a man over Israel, that he "may bring them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep

which have no shepherd" (Numbers 27:16-17). Ezekiel 34:1-31 has God requiring the prophet to speak "against the shepherds of Israel" because they were not caring for the flock God had given to them.

Christ has appointed that local congregations of His church should be led by men who are designated as shepherds or pastors. Both words mean the same. These men are also called "elders" in Acts 20:17 because they were to be older and men of experience; in verse 28 they are called "overseers" because they were to look after "all the flock." Paul said to these men, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God (the Lord, ASV), which he hath purchased with his own blood" (verse 28). The word "feed" in this verse means "to shepherd" the church, which is God's flock in the New Testament. The apostle continues the imagery of the shepherds and the flock in verses 29-31, as he warns them to protect the flock from wolves. "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (verse 31). Thus, the shepherds of God's flock (the church) are to look after and care for the sheep, which means: "to feed" the flock upon "the word of his grace" (verse 32); and also to guard and protect the sheep from "grievous wolves [which] enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (verses 28-29).

Verse 31 is a key verse in Paul's admonition to the eldership from Ephesus. The key word is "**watch**!" Being a good shepherd means **constant watchfulness**, which Paul said he himself did while he preached in Ephesus for three years. What these elders/shepherds were to "remember" was that Paul "**ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.**" Obviously, Paul expected these elders to be on guard and to be informed regarding the "wolves" (false teachers) who come into congregations and ravage the flock. Remember, too, the Lord said that these

"wolves" come dressed in "sheep's clothing," meaning they are deceptive and try to disguise their true intentions (Matthew 7:15). **Elders/shepherds, you need to check the wool on each member, yourselves and your preacher included!** Anyone who contends that this is a negative and unChristian outlook should remember that this admonition comes from the apostle Paul and that he was inspired by Christ's Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-13; Ephesians 3:3-5 et al.).

Shepherds - Qualifications and Duties

The qualifications and duties of God's shepherds (elders, overseers) are set forth in First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. In First Timothy 3:2 Paul requires that an elder be "apt to teach," meaning "able" to teach. That requires that elders know the truth of God's word and stand ready to defend it. This point is well emphasized by Paul in the qualifications he gives in Titus 1:9, saying that an elder must be "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (NKJV). Those who speak against the "faithful word" are "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers... Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:10-11). **If a man does not have the knowledge to teach the word of God and the stomach to defend it against "vain talkers and deceivers," he should not be a shepherd of God's flock!** If an elder cannot do these things he cannot properly feed the flock, whether it is personally done by him or through other teachers and preachers whom he is supposed to oversee.

Brethren and friends, I am not trying to be excessively hard on those presently serving as shepherds of God's flock. I'm simply reminding us of what God's Word says on this topic and why. Paul reminded elders that he wanted them to watch, as he had, and to warn every one night and day as he had, even with tears. This too is an element of living the Christian faith. Be wary of anyone who shies away from a willingness to tell you what he or

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she believes about crucial doctrines of the Bible. Elders have the right to ask for a full accounting of what one believes in such areas, especially if one is going to be preaching to or teaching the flock over which the elders have the oversight.

Where Are The Shepherds?

Denominational religions are locked in the throes of fast moving change. The Lord's church has not escaped this problem. There is a legion of preachers who have been drinking deeply from the polluted cisterns of denominational teaching. Irresponsible shepherds have allowed these men to come in among the flocks of God's people and to overthrow the faith of some, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). Instead of stopping the mouths of these false teachers, as Paul demanded shepherds do, these so-called leaders give them an open opportunity to do untold damage to the flocks. These men often give pretense of being loving, kind and tolerant, but they do not truly love God and His Word (cf. John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 5:3). Neither is one being kind to another if he leads one away from the truth of God's Word (John 8:31-32; 17:17). Such men will not be very tolerant toward those who expose them and their false teaching. Some of the most vicious words and hateful attitudes I have had directed

against me are from those against whom I have had to stand in order to defend God's Word.

Where are the responsible shepherds when some preachers are allowed to deny the essential nature of baptism in order to receive forgiveness of one's sins? Where are the true shepherds when men who are wolves in sheep's clothing are allowed to teach that one can become a Christian by merely saying the manmade "sinner's prayer"? Where are those who are supposed to "feed the church of God" with "the word of his grace" when preachers and elders allow adultery to go uncorrected among those unscripturally divorced and remarried? On and on we could go with like examples.

Many elders have simply given up their roles as shepherds of God's flock and given the preacher those responsibilities. Of course, such is sinful. God did not put preachers, as preachers, over His people. Elders can preach, but preachers are not automatically shepherds. Pastor is actually a word which means the same as shepherd, and that word is reserved for the same men who serve as elders and overseers. The denominational world is simply wrong when they identify their preachers as "pastors." Shepherds (pastors) in the New Testament are identical to the elders and overseers, as shown from Acts 20:17, 28. Overseers (Acts 20:28) are also called "bishops" in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. This is the same Greek word translated by two different English words. But "bishops" (overseers) are also "elders" (cf. Titus 1:5-7). Thus, those to be in charge in each congregation are not evangelists, preachers and ministers (the word group referring to those who preach), but elders, overseers, and shepherds/pastors (the word group referring to those whom God desires to lead His local churches).

Judgment Against Irresponsible Shepherds

Ezekiel 34 tells us of the type of judgment God will bring upon derelict elders, who have not fed, led, and protected God's flock (verses 1-5). "[T]herefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand" (verses 9-10, NKJV). Shepherd elders will be judged by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Peter, who was an apostle, was also an elder in the Lord's church. He encouraged his fellow **elders** to: "**Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you, serving as **overseers**, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest

gain but eagerly, nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:1-4, NKJV).

Elders (shepherds), are you feeding, leading, and protecting "**those entrusted to you**"? Will you receive the "crown of glory" or the "Woe" of judgment God pronounces against irresponsible shepherds (Jeremiah 23:1-2; Ezekiel 34:1-10)? As shepherds of God's flock you must stand between the flock and the "wolves in sheep's clothing" who seek to destroy them through their "vain talk and deceit." Paul said, "[Their] mouths must be stopped," before they overthrow the faith of God's people.

What Can You Do?

What if you are a member of a congregation where the shepherds (elders) do not lead in God's pathways, nor see that the flock is fed God's Word, nor protect the sheep from the dangers of false teaching and practices? **First**, in Christian love go to your elders and express your concerns. They need to know that you will support them in every way, as long as they are doing what God requires (cf. Titus 1:9-11). **Second**, ask your preacher to speak on the qualifications and responsibilities of local shepherds (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). **Third**, pray about these matters that God may grant you the wisdom to proceed according to His will (James 1:5-6).

What if these efforts fail? Are there other options? You can repeat what we listed above, taking others with you who share your concerns, but remember not to go to your elders with a lynch mob mentality. Seek to get them to act because of what God's Word says, not because they fear you! I know that there is a reluctance on the part of many Christians to confront people or situations which need correcting. We like things to be at peace. However, James 3:17 says that "the wisdom that is from above is **first pure, then peaceable, gentle...**" There really is no peace when God's shepherds are not tending the flock as He requires. Also, remember that the Lord stated that faithfulness to Him would sometimes divide family and friends who wanted to walk their own ways instead of following Him (Matthew 10:34-39). Second Peter 2 and the epistle of Jude remind us, "But there were [in the Old Testament] false prophets among them, even as there shall be false teachers among you..."

If something is not done soon, on a wide scale, **much** of the Lord's church will soon be nothing more than **another denomination. Preachers must preach all the truth**, "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) and deal with the problems of our day, including the failure of shepherds to be protectors of the flock (Acts 20:17-32). **Elders must demand that preachers preach all the truth and fire them if they do not, while disciplining any other false teachers in the congregation!** Informed, caring elders can save a greater portion of the church that now seems headed for apostasy! **Members in local congregations must demand accountability from the preachers and elders to do what God requires of them!** In congregations where there are no elders (shepherds), the leading, knowledgeable men of the church must step forward to see that the mouths of false teachers are stopped.

What can one do when every avenue of trying to correct apostasy in a congregation is exhausted? First, I do not believe that one should even think about leaving a local church until all attempts of the measures stated above have failed. Persistent, loving, informative efforts can change things. Second, there is a danger that you will become so used to each degree of drift from the truth that newer steps away from God's truth no longer bother you, like the proverbial cooking of a frog in a pot one degree at a time. I have seen this happen in some who have stayed in a local church, hoping to restore it, long after the elders and preacher have quit listening to pleas to get back into the "old paths" (Jeremiah 6:16). When one is no longer being taught the whole truth; when your children are not being taught the whole truth in their Bible classes; when the money you contribute is being used to fund unauthorized and sinful practices; when things have changed so much that you do not believe you can worship God properly; when your presence and influence are being used to further the apostasy and exalt manmade commandments and doctrines, you need to try to find a congregation that is being true to the gospel of Jesus Christ, where you can worship and work in harmony with His word (John 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3).

Anxiously, we ask again, **"Where are the shepherds of God's sheep?"** Hopefully, we will begin to hear each one say, "Here am I," and begin to see each one earnestly and lovingly take seriously his role to feed

pure doctrine to the flock, while he protects each sheep in the flock from the many ravenous wolves who will not spare any. To use a phrase that Paul used, brethren, **"it is high time to awake out of sleep."** Shepherds of God's flock, wake up! Feed! Lead! Watch! Protect! Your work is difficult, but the reward is a "crown of glory" which never fades (1 Peter 5:4).

THE INGREDIENTS OF A 15 MINUTE SERMON

by Dennis Gullege

Did you hear about the Baptist preacher, recently, who decided to cut his religious services down to 22 minutes and issued it as a challenge to see if people would be bold enough to "receive their religion in small doses"? He wanted to do for his preaching what McDonald's has done for food – make it fast! What this preacher proposes is nothing new, and he certainly is right up there with some of our brethren in his fascination for brevity.

The length of a sermon is purely a subjective matter. There is no right and wrong as to the time involved. The personal preferences of people get involved and everybody has their opinion about it. As far as opinions go, one is about as good as another.

It isn't as though I haven't given some thought to learning the art of the 15 minute sermon. I have given serious consideration to the ingredients of such, and here are my conclusions:

1. Leave out a lot of Scripture. Keep to a minimum the quoting, reading, and preaching of the Word.
2. Dispense with heartfelt appeals for lost souls.
3. Don't study.
4. Eliminate applications from Bible passages that might fit our time and situations in life. It might take a few minutes.
5. Quit calling them sermons and call them "nice little talks," or better yet, "sermonettes."
6. Forget boldness in the pulpit – you might be prompted to linger.
7. Never condemn sin! There is too much of that to have to deal with. For the sake of brevity you may just have to ignore it.
8. Minimize any concern for the disobedient and wayward persons in your audience. You might spend too many tears privately and too many words publicly in

trying to reach them. And besides, people will be too busy studying their watches to hear what is said anyway.

9. Leave out any treatment of issues troubling the church. You might be perceived as being "negative," and you might get bogged down in warning people.

10. Just have something to say instead of something you have to say. Try to squelch any feelings of earnestness about your task. Just get the job done quickly!

This is what I would have to recommend to my preaching brethren if they are to learn the art of the 15 minute sermon. However, it appears that many of them caught on years ago, when you consider some of the ingredients above. All in all, it appears that more is left out of the sermon than is put in.

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WHAT ABOUT INDOCTRINATION?

by Burl Curtis

Some see indoctrination as only "bad" and to be avoided. It is a combination of "in" and "doctrine," to get doctrine in a person, to instruct, to teach. It is to instruct in, or imbue (soak) with doctrines, theories, or beliefs, as of a sect.

Some people have been so "soaked" with false doctrine they find it very difficult to seriously consider anything different. When they hear a different teaching their hearts immediately want to reject it. Their prejudices dominate and feelings and memories of childhood are so strong they become very uncomfortable. Triggered deep within their soul is the realization if I accept what I read in the Bible, I will have to admit I have been wrong and my father and mother may be lost. They choose to misunderstand or count the true doctrine as tribulation or persecution. Jesus describes such "indoctrinated" people as "wayside" or "stony" ground. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which receiveth seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth [endures] for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because

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of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matt. 13:19-21). Hard packed and rocky soil can be broken but not easily. Paul wrote that "indoctrination" may "hide" the gospel. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not... (2 Cor. 4:3, 4). If you are "soaked" in something, it is easy to be blind. "There are none so blind as those who will not see." Since no false nor sectarian producing doctrine can be found in God's Word, all such indoctrination is a great evil.

Proper indoctrination is a great blessing. "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). Is this not indoctrination? The good and honest heart finds it wonderful to be "permeated" with true teaching. Paul told the Ephesian elders, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house... (Acts 20:20). Paul tried to get every profitable doctrine "in" them. But, unlike improper indoctrination, the indoctrination the Lord wants us to receive never blinds, never causes us to reject truth that we have not understood before. It always leaves the person free to accept or reject. God wants only volunteers. His indoctrination never forces anyone to follow him nor does it force one to keep following.

An example of "bad" indoctrination would be the converts of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said, "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15). Timothy was indoctrinated properly. From a child he had known the holy scriptures; he had a sincere faith which first was in his grandmother and mother. (See 2 Tim. 3:15 and 1:5) Is it not very clear that indoctrination may be "good" or "bad" depending with what a person is saturated and how it is done?

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No man is a safe teacher or preacher if he is seeking a reputation. The desire for man's applause utterly unfits one for being a true believer. "How can ye believe who seek glory one of another?"

WHICH DISTURBS YOU MOST?

1. A sermon five minutes too long...or a lunch half an hour late?
2. A soul lost in hell...or a scratch on a new car?
3. The need for a Sunday School Teacher... or the need for a new hat?
4. Your Bible unopened...or your newspaper unread?
5. Contributions to the church decreasing... or your income decreasing?
6. Children late for Sunday School...or late for public school?
7. To miss Bible Study...or miss your favorite TV program?
8. Low attendance at worship service... or low attendance at a club meeting?
9. Your child rebelling against you...or you rebelling against God?
10. A rainy Lord's Day...or a rainy work day?
11. An unpaid bill from a merchant...or a withheld contribution from the Lord?
12. A lazy employee...or your laziness in God's service?

-Greenbriar Bulletin

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**GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP
- COLOSSIANS 3:17**

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 16:1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-23).

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