

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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GOOD SHEPHERDS WATCH & PROTECT

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

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 hath been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” 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

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other teachers and preachers whom he is supposed to oversee.

Judgment Against Irresponsible Shepherds

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.

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 protec-

tors of the flock (Acts 20:17-32). **Elders must demand that preachers preach all the truth and fire them if they do not, while also 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.

Ezekiel 34 tells us of the type of judgement God will bring upon derelict elders, who have not fed, led, and protected God's flock. 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 "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight, not by constraint but willingly" (1 Peter 5: 1-2).

Elders (shepherds), are you feeding, leading, and perfecting "God's heritage"? 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).

Anxiously, we ask, **"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 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).

[* edited from a previous article in FCGN.]



Absurd Reactions To Elders' Watchcare

by Farrell Nicholson

Vigilance In Secular Matters

One could tell of a man, who, after he was given charge of a large sheep farm, was told his duties as to tending the flock. The proprietor told him that he would each day check the sheep (for illness, missing animals, etc.), watch for and defend against predators, and finally, feed the sheep. The man always wanted to do the best job he could in doing anything, and it was no different with his present occupation. He cared about the image he would procure in the mind of his employer as to the charge he was given. There came a man from a nearby town, which had been involved in a bitter feud with the landowner/proprietor. He decided to inflict terrible damages on his enemy by poisoning his sheep. As he was carrying out this malicious deed, the shepherd noticed him. The shepherd asked the perpetrator, "What are you doing?" To which the man answered, "Oh, the rations which you have been feeding these sheep are substandard. Can you not see that the sheep do not like the taste of it? This new feed I have here will rejuvenate your flock." The farmer

inquired if he could analyze the feed. The criminal asked why. The farmer told him, "I have been given charge of the sheep. If anything happens to them, I will have to give answer to my employer. I will have the feed tested before you give it to them." The villain was wroth. He exclaimed, "I have been to the agricultural college, and I know better than you what the sheep want and need!" He continued, "You have no right whatsoever to prevent me from feeding these sheep. You are just set in your ways, and you will only distribute the type of feed YOU want. You are biased and your only desire is to control myself and others!" Absurd? Indeed!

In the shadow of the recent terrorist attacks on the United States, our government has enacted new and improved safeguards; ones that attempt to prevent subsequent attacks. The national borders are being vigilantly guarded. One of the government's duties is to defend and protect its citizens. These measures are an attempt to ensure that very safety. The Attorney General states, "As a nation of immigrants, America welcomes friends from other countries who wish to visit, to study, to work, become a part of our nation. But as September the 11th vividly illustrates, aliens also come to our country with the intent to do great evil. Just as we welcome America's friends, we will not allow our welcome to be abused by those who are America's enemies. The Department of Justice will prevent aliens who engage in or support terrorist activity from entering our country. We will detain, prosecute, and deport terrorist aliens who are already inside the nation's borders. America will not allow terrorists to use our hospitality as a weapon against us." (U.S. Department of Justice's web page). What right does the United States government have to keep potentially harmful and deadly individuals from entering and remaining in this country? Enemies of the U.S.A. might say, the government is just trying to impose its judgment upon its citizens and those of the world. The United States is denying these individuals certain rights, albeit they are terrorists.

The terrorists have a right to go wherever they want, and to do whatever they want, in this free society? The government has no right to restrict the terrorists' actions." Absurd? Absolutely!

Vigilance in Spiritual Matters

Well, there are some in the Lord's precious Body that have become enamored with every new Bible "version" that hits the press. Every new translation, we are told, is an improvement over the reliable Bibles we have studied in the past. These new "Bibles" (I put quotation marks around the words because the translators of many of the new versions have mishandled and changed the words of Holy Writ) teach all types of error, from the pernicious doctrines of faith only, premillennialism, and hereditary total depravity (inherited sin), to name a few. **That's just from the New International Version!** See Romans 1:17, Acts 3:21, and Psalm 51:5, each from the NIV. Informed and concerned elderships have sometimes made decisions to prohibit the use of several such translations in the worship and classes of the local congregation. Some elderships will ask that preachers and teachers use only reliable, tested, and proven translations of the Scriptures. Do they have this right, or are they overstepping their bounds? Deity has entrusted elders with the care of His flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). The elders of a local congregation of Christians watch for the souls of the members and they shall give account in the Judgment of how they fulfilled (or failed to fulfill) this task (Hebrews 13:17). Some have vehemently questioned the authority of elders who ask men to use only reliable versions and have used vituperative language, charging that such to the elderships "desire to control others," etc.

Well, what is it then? In our examples in previous paragraphs, was the concerned shepherd only thinking of himself, jealous of the criminal, who would poison and destroy his employer's flock? Is our nation's government depriving terrorists their unalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, by preventing them from entering our borders and causing

the death of its citizens? To answer in the affirmative is ridiculous. Then, to say that elders of a local congregation who attempt to prevent sheep of the Lord's fold from being led astray by the false doctrines presented by the "new Bibles" are egotistical, selfish, and overstepping their prescribed boundaries, is equally bizarre.

Do elders have the duty to prevent the members whom they are shepherding from being poisoned with false teaching? YES! Are the elders who decide to do this obsessed with control of the brotherhood, and biased in their fellowship? NO! In assuring that sound, pure New Testament teaching is propagated, they are not trying to "lord it over" the brethren, but rather proving their love for both God and their precious brethren in Christ.

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Simple Words at the Death of a Great Man by Eddy Gilpin

Numerous are the good men and women to be found within the pages of inspiration. Many good things are said about these faithful followers of the Lord. One such individual is Joshua, the great leader of the Israelites following the death of Moses. The words spoken of him at his death are simple words, yet words of tremendous significance. Examine them and learn from this great man of God.

In Joshua 24:29 the Bible states, "And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old" (cf. Judges 2:8). It is interesting that much could have been said about Joshua in this text but was not. It could have said "Joshua, the great statesman of Israel, died." It could have said, "Joshua, the leader of the people of Israel into Canaan, died." It could have said, "Joshua, the conqueror of the enemies of God, died." It could have truthfully said all of these. However, what it does say encompasses them all. Joshua was truly a "servant of the Lord."

As "the servant of the Lord" he was a great statesman in Israel, a political leader second to none. As "the servant of the Lord" he was the leader of the people of Israel; and that during one of the greatest periods they would ever know. As "the servant of the Lord" he was the conqueror of the enemies of God, having claimed for Him the land of Canaan and met valiantly the forces of the inhabitants thereof. As "the servant of the Lord" he maintained his allegiance to God and obeyed His words.

No statue is erected of Joshua. No marble pillar is engraved with his name and accomplishments. He has no "star" in any walk of fame dedicated by men. However, his name is recorded in Heaven and his dedication is recognized on high. Because of this, the simple words "the servant of the Lord" are all that is needed at the end of such a devoted life. How about you? Will these simple words describe your life because, like Joshua, you have followed the Lord?

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The Gospel
by Max Patterson

The word "gospel" means good news, or glad tidings. The gospel is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16). We are most fortunate that God loved us (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8,9) and provided us a way to escape from our sins and their consequences.

Notice some thing that the gospel can do:

- ✓ It can be declared. Paul declared it to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:1). There are many methods that could be used to declare the gospel, but God chose teaching and preaching (Mk. 16:15)
- ✓ The gospel can be received (1 Cor. 15:1). In our world there is a great amount of resistance. However, when the gospel is presented in love, it is a powerful, moving influence. Whether a group (3,000 were converted on Pentecost), or an individual (the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8), the gospel can save those who receive it.

- ✓ Men can stand in the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1).
- ✓ The gospel can save (1 Cor. 15:2) this is what Jesus claimed when he commanded the gospel to be preached. He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."
- ✓ The gospel can be kept in one's memory (1 Cor. 15:2). We must not ever forget our salvation.
- ✓ Men can believe the gospel in vain (1 Cor. 15:2). Although there are people who do not believe it is possible, Paul obviously believed it and was led to write it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote that he had to buffet his body and bring it into subjection, "lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Cor. 9:27).

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (1 Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

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