



By

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Shepherd ... what's the first thought that comes to mind when you hear that word? Someone whose job it is to feed and protect a herd of sheep. Right? If a shepherd fails to feed and protect a herd of sheep, does that mean they are no longer a shepherd? No. It just means they are **bad** at being a shepherd. They are still a shepherd, but they either never did the job well or lost the desire or ability over time.

Best Examples of a Shepherd

Jesus Christ is the best example of a 'spiritual' shepherd. We read about Him in Psalm 23 –

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Notice what King David, who was a shepherd as a boy, said about the Lord being his Shepherd –

- I shall not want
- He makes me to lie down in green pastures
- He leads me beside the still waters
- He restores my soul
- He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake

The Lord Jesus said this about being the 'Good Shepherd' –

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice ... Then Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture ... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd ... Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not

believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one. John 10

The 'good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.' A good spiritual shepherd will do the same. That was a lesson Jesus wanted to teach the Apostle Peter. Peter had denied Jesus three times prior to the Lord's Crucifixion. I believe Jesus demonstrated His love and forgiveness toward Peter even as He taught the apostle the importance of the work he would do as a 'spiritual shepherd.'

Feed, Tend, Feed

After the Resurrection – Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter answered each time that he did. Jesus responded to Peter with a command –

- Feed My lambs
- Tend My sheep
- Feed My sheep

Jesus wanted Peter to understand that his work would include 'feeding' young lambs. The word for 'feed' is *boskó*, which is the idea of taking the lambs with the rest of the flock to a 'pasture' where they would find nourishing food to eat. Next, Jesus wanted Peter to know that he was to continue 'shepherding' the lambs by 'tending' to them. The word for 'tend' is *poimainó*, which is the idea of 'herding' the sheep to protect them as well as to lead them to 'green pastures' where they would eat. Thirdly, Jesus wanted Peter to know that his work was to 'feed' (*boskó*) the lambs to maturity. Lambs need

to grow up to become full-grown sheep that can serve the interests of the shepherd or the 'owner' of the flock. That's the work of a 'shepherd.'

It's interesting that Peter wrote this in his first letter –

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 1 Peter 2:1-3

Peter learned that being a 'shepherd' of God's flock included helping young believers desire the 'pure milk of the word' so they would grow. Growth leads to maturity, which is what Peter addressed when he wrote about believers becoming mature and 'laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.' Peter knew that Jesus wanted him to 'feed' and 'protect' His lambs and sheep.

Gifts to Men

When Jesus ascended to Heaven, He 'gave gifts to men.'
One of those gifts was that of a 'shepherd' –

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. Ephesians 4:11

The English word 'pastors' comes from the Latin, but the Greek word is *poimén* – which means 'shepherd.' Jesus gave 'shepherds' to His Church. Why?

... for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the

truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:12-16

The word 'equipping' means 'preparing, perfecting, bringing to condition of fitness' (from the Greek word *katartismos*). The word 'edifying' means 'building up' (from the Greek word *oikodomé*). The goal of 'shepherding' then is that the Body of Christ will come to 'the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'

The best examples of human spiritual shepherds are those who focus on building up the 'flock of God' to become like Christ. What does that entail? Feeding and protecting the sheep. Good shepherds ensure that the sheep are fed the best 'doctrinal' diet so they won't fall for 'every wind of doctrine.' Good shepherds ensure that the sheep won't be tricked by others, 'in the cunning craftiness of deceitful

plotting.' Good shepherds 'speak the truth in love' so that the sheep will 'grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.'

When spiritual shepherds are good at their work, 'the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.' That's what a good shepherd does.

What does a 'bad shepherd' do?

Worst Examples of a Shepherd

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. John 10:1

But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. John 10:12-13

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:15

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for

three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:29-31

All of these examples of bad shepherding (and there are many other examples in Scripture) point to the dangers that good shepherds have to take seriously. Yes, God's people need to be fed. It starts with the 'milk' of the Word, but eventually needs to become 'solid' food –

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of

milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. Hebrews 5:12-13

A good 'spiritual shepherd' will know how to give milk to lambs, then move them on to solid food. Unfortunately, we're seeing very little of that in the Church today. So many people in churches are either 'babes' in Christ or unsaved (thinking they are saved). How does that happen?

What The Church Needs Now

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

The Church needs shepherds who 'take heed' to themselves and to all the flock that God has made them 'overseers.' The Church needs shepherds who never forget that God 'purchased' the sheep 'with His own blood.'

The Church today is in a bad way, primarily because of having too many 'bad shepherds' and not enough 'good shepherds.' These 'bad' shepherds either don't know how to 'feed' or 'protect' God's people, or they don't want to do that.

Unfortunately, the problem is getting worse. Even some spiritual shepherds that many people thought were 'good,' are being revealed as not being as good as we thought. They are leading members of God's flock 'astray.'

Some of the pastors leading people 'astray' are pastor's-pastors. What I mean by that is some pastors reach a position in life where they teach other pastors how to pastor or are looked up to, admired, and imitated by other pastors – possibly because they pastor 'mega' churches, are on television and radio, speak at pastors' conferences, write books, etc. If a pastor's-pastor goes in a wrong direction, the potential for them leading other pastors astray is higher because of their position. What they say and do can have serious consequences –

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. James 3:1-5

Very good advice from the Holy Spirit. Shepherds of God's flock will receive a 'stricter judgment.' We should also consider that as we preach, teach, and give counsel to God's 'sheep.'

Peeling the Spiritual Onion

I believe God is peeling the 'spiritual' onion by revealing some of the 'bad' shepherds in the Church. We have seen several high-profile pastors recently 'revealed' for either incorrect teaching or sinful behavior. We are closing in on the 'end of the age' and Christ's return is fast approaching. It seems that God is speaking 'Truth' to His flock through these 'revelations.'

We need to hear and obey what He tells us and shows us. Some of what we see as God peels the spiritual onion may be hard to watch, but we need to see it. We need to know who is on the Lord's side – and who isn't.

Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:11-14

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