

from among them would arise men who would be enemies of Christ and would destroy the sheep. They would teach perverse things to draw away disciples after them. "Drawing away" meant they would be leaving the safety of faithful membership in the church of God. The shepherds at Ephesus, like those in the Old Testament, would "scatter the sheep," and would discontinue to feed them with the proper diet, the word of God!

A group may continue to meet for years under so-called shepherds and in a building with "Church of Christ" carved on the front; but, that does not mean God still recognizes them. In chapters two and three of Revelation, some of the seven churches received warnings to repent or have their candlestick removed by the Lord. That meant they would lose their light-bearing abilities and would be lost.

Paul had done all he could. He had *"not shunned to declare all the counsel of God to them."* That is all any preacher can do, whether inspired or not. There are no inspired men today, but it does not relieve any preacher from the duty to preach and teach, to the best of his ability, the word that will judge all men in the last day.

One of the most serious statements to elders, or any considering being an elder is: *"...for they (elders, shepherds, bishops, pastors, overseers) watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief."* This statement, and others in the Bible, should send a chill through the body of any man who is already an elder, or is considering becoming one. It ought to cause a lot of soul searching before one assumes the most awesome responsibility known to man: that of being a shepherd over God's flock.

Consider the reward! Consider the reward for being a faithful shepherd, but also consider the reward if one fails to live up to his responsibilities as a shepherd. No one is forced to be a shepherd; but, IF that decision is made, the rewards in this life will be minimal and the heartaches many, and the responsibilities are surely awesome and almost overwhelming.

Being a shepherd over God's people is one of the most important and demanding duties a man is called upon to do. It is entered voluntarily and the burdens are great and yet rewarding if one continues faithful unto the end.

Let all caring saints pray that the church will raise up and train men to be elders who will be qualified to shepherd the flock. It will take much study on their part and a willingness to serve God at any cost. It will involve marrying the right woman who is capable of helping rear faithful children.

Though men who are scripturally qualified to be shepherds seem to be few today, the need has never been greater. Will you help someone become a shepherd over the flock of God. If you are a young man, and have the faith, knowledge, and determination, why don't you prepare yourself to be a shepherd over the church of God?

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God's Message To The SHEPHERDS Of His Sheep

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The following passages give some of the instructions as well as some of the responsibilities of God's SHEPHERDS under both the Old and New Covenants.

"His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are SHEPHERDS that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter" (Isa. 56:10-11).

"Son of man, prophesy against the SHEPHERDS of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the SHEPHERDS; Woe be to the SHEPHERDS of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the SHEPHERDS feed the flocks" (Ezek. 34:2)?

"My people hath been lost sheep: their SHEPHERDS have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace" (Jer. 50:6).

"Therefore, ye SHEPHERDS, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no SHEPHERD, neither did my SHEPHERDS search for my flock, but the SHEPHERDS fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye SHEPHERDS, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the SHEPHERDS; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the SHEPHERDS feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them" (Ezek. 34:7-10).

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you OVERSEERS, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:2-4).

The man with the most awesome responsibility is not the president or any politician, it is the responsibilities of being an elder (a SHEPHERD, bishop, pastor, overseer) in the Lord's church. However, to see how some who claim to be SHEPHERDS treat those responsibilities, you would probably come to the conclusion that they have little real concern about the duties described in the Pattern found only in the Bible. Some of these men would appear to be a board of directors over a social club, rather than SHEPHERDS over God's church (spiritual Israel).

I have quoted passages from the Old Testament (cf. Rom 15:4) to show that God has always held His shepherds responsible for their duties to the flock for which they are given oversight. I have quoted the inspired writers of the New Testament to show that the duties of the shepherds under Christ are not so different from those under the prophets. Further, we learn that God will not take lightly the neglecting of duties by shepherds under either Testament.

The “better” translation (in my opinion, E.G.) in Ephesians 4:11 of the Greek word *poimen* would have been SHEPHERDS, rather than, pastors. The Greek word is found 18 times in the New Testament, and is translated pastors one time, and shepherd(s) 17 times. Jesus is called both a Shepherd and a Bishop.

I prefer the term shepherds, because not only are shepherds to see that the flock is fed, but also that they are visited regularly to see if any are ill and in need of special care. This kind of care by shepherds is almost as rare in churches of Christ as is discipline by these same men. If a sheep is found to have a disease which is fatal and contagious, it must be isolated and kept apart from the healthy sheep. Shepherds who “know their sheep,” will know when special measures are needed, and faithful shepherds will care for the sick, the lame, and will hunt the ones gone astray. Is that the way it is today? It is, only where men know and appreciate the awesome responsibilities of being a shepherd. It is only where men realize that not only are they watching for souls, but that God holds them personally responsible for souls in their fold.

In many (maybe most) places, a group of men who know little, if anything, about God's duties for His shepherds assume the “board of directors” attitude, which is completely foreign to the New Testament Pattern. They then attempt to “rule by remote control by holding closed meetings among themselves periodically. They hire a PR man called, THE Minister, and who is the “designated” sub-shepherd. He is to “feed” the flock with sermonettes full of catchy, flowery phrases which will keep everyone

happy and feeling good about themselves. Thus, in the modern church, under the sub-shepherd, seldom is heard a negative word, and the board continues to play the game of being SHEPHERDS. If the college trained pulpit “puppet” forgets his “p's and q's” learned under the distinguished professor, he is called before the ruling committee and given his options.

The duties of shepherds (elders, bishops, overseers) are to feed and to lead: not to sit and send. While successful elders must learn to delegate some responsibilities, they must set examples for the flock. If elders expect one under their oversight to win souls, they must lead the way. If elders expect members to be students of the Bible, they must be examples. If elders expect members to live right, they must lead an exemplary life before the sheep. Leaderless sheep are subject to all kinds of problems. Shepherds who are out of touch with the fold, leave the door of the sheepfold open to all kinds of dangers. God said, *“Woe to the shepherds who have allowed my sheep to go astray.”* Yet, many shepherds expect the “hired man” to keep up with the sheep, and to tend to their problems. But, that is not God's plan at all.

Why is the church of Christ in many places today ignorant, indifferent, and spiritually unemployed? Because a local church will do no better than they are taught, and most will not do as well as they are taught. Thus, the key is teaching, both in word and in deed (Col. 3:17).

In the verses quoted at the beginning of this article, God said *the shepherds were ignorant!* That is also one of the problems in spiritual Israel today (Gal. 6:16). One of the qualifications for a shepherd is desire (1 Tim. 3:1). Some congregations have taken a man's desire for the work and his ability to bare offspring, as the two qualifications necessary to be a bishop. However, ignorant shepherds will result in an ignorant membership.

Another defect in the shepherds of old was, *they could not bark!* What good is a watchdog that cannot bark? No one would buy a watchdog that could not bark, for that is what they do when it is needed. Their barking warns the unsuspecting of danger. Rather than being on guard, and ready to sound a warning, the shepherds like to sleep and slumber. Like dogs, the shepherds were greedy, and never have enough. Today, many shepherds, rather than leading the church in doing the work Jesus came to do (“to seek and save the lost,” Luke 19:10), sit and wish for sheep from other flocks to come and join their sheepfold. Depending on WHO the preacher is, and the message he speaks, sheep from other folds will be drawn to them. And, in many areas, this is exactly what has happened.

In one of the most powerful passages in the book of Acts, Paul addressed the shepherds of the flock in Ephesus. In Acts 20:17-35, Paul spoke to the elders in a tearful plea as he reminded them of his association with them, of their responsibilities to the church at Ephesus, and what would soon happen to the congregation due to the very men he was addressing. He began by reminding them of their primary duty to self, and then to the flock. Then he must have stabbed deeply into their consciences as he told them that