

“Shepherd the Church of God”

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*“Be on guard for yourselves and for 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*

Who is a faithful Shepherd? How is such an assessment made? What criteria should be used to write the “job description” of the Pastor/Elder? This study, for me, is immediate and direct. Its impact on me has been significant, and I believe the impact on the sheep will be to their gain. The struggle in defining the Shepherd’s role is not by personal gifting, but by the Scriptural parameters. No matter how gifted a person might be in all things good and necessary, if they do not have the gifting for the role of Shepherd, then they should not occupy the office of Shepherd.

The Bible identifies a type of leadership within local churches as Shepherds (Eph. 4:11). The word “Pastor” in Ephesians 4:11 is the same word used in John 10 for “Shepherd.” The verbal form of the word is used in Acts 20:28 to describe the work of the elder. He is “to shepherd” or “feed” the flock of God.

In today’s upside down world, the role of pastor has been greatly misunderstood and equally diminished. Consumerism has fostered a spirit of marketing that has had a negative impact on the pastoral role. Equally destructive is a welding of growth and maturity as synonymous ideas when in reality they are very distinct. This has fostered and promoted the idea of “job descriptions” that are anything but biblical. There is a pressing need for pastors and churches to once more define the role of pastor and what are the expectations and obligations of the “church” toward that role.

The Scripture paints a harmonized picture where Shepherds and sheep dwell together. The only pictures in Scripture of shepherdless sheep are dark and foreboding (Mark 6:34; Ezek. 34:5). Sheep have Shepherds and Shepherds are to feed the sheep nourishing food by leading them into fertile pastures (Ps. 23:1, 2; Ezek. 34:3; John 21:16, 17). A responsibility of Shepherds is to protect the flock from harm (Ezek. 34; Acts 20). If necessary, the Shepherd will lay his life down for the sheep (John 10). The everyday activity of the Shepherd is to minister through the Word, Prayer, and Oversight (Acts 6). Much discussion seeks to explain what this looks like, but in being undefined we are not to conclude that it is unnecessary or not doable.

Shepherds work in the Word and in Prayer in their Oversight of the sheep. They are not to micromanage the sheep. It is not their responsibility to act like sheep. Sheep act like sheep and Shepherds are to behave like Shepherds, not sheep. When Shepherds are called upon to increase the numerical size of a flock, then Shepherds are not functioning

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as Shepherds but like sheep, and this is to the detriment of all involved. Equally so sheep are not to lead sheep. Shepherds lead sheep. The simplicity of this reading beguiles the seriousness of getting it wrong. In the midst of trying to get it right at the local church level, much harm can be perpetuated by defaulting to the good and neglecting the best. An identifier of church health is not determined by the size of one's flock, but by the health of the Shepherd and his sheep. Numerical growth and spiritual growth are not mutually exclusive but neither are they synonymous. Let us not be deceived by all things good and thus rob ourselves of that which is best.

Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24 speaks of leaders who lead with joy. Their joy comes from contented sheep. Some would argue that the leadership in Hebrews 13 is generic and not specially elders/pastors. Yet there is no reason not to see this as the leadership within the local church. The greatest need of sheep is for them to have biblical shepherds, and the greatest need of shepherds is to stringently adhere to the biblical role of shepherd leader.

May God grant us insight to accept the simple truth of this clear passage.