

“Jesus Christ: The Structure of the Church”

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October 14, 2007

The imagery used by the New Testament to describe the relationship of Jesus Christ to His church speaks of a degree of structure that often goes overlooked in today's church. Not only is He the head of His body, but He is also the Shepherd of His sheep. This short writing will focus on Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd and those whom He has left in His wake as elder-shepherds, who are responsible to oversee His flock in His absence. There are two passages highlighting this idea.

¹ “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² **shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would **set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city** as I directed you” (Titus 1:5).

God, as the Chief Shepherd, has placed in His physical absence “lesser” shepherds whose chief responsibility is to shepherd His sheep. The New Testament calls this shepherding activity “oversight.”

“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).

The elders of a fellowship are specifically responsible for the sheep within their immediate “flock.” This flock is definable by those who have aligned themselves to a specific geographical location through membership. Although there is a larger group of sheep made up of all who are saved, this larger group is broken down into specific geographical flocks. Some can argue against the idea of membership, but it would seem apparent that shepherding responsibilities are only extended to the immediate sheep of a definable “flock.” No shepherd is responsible for the sheep of another flock. Although I am not accountable for the soul care of sheep not within my immediate flock, there are certain responsibilities I have toward other shepherds.

First, shepherds have a responsibility to watch after the sheep of another fold when the sheep wander into their flock. Second, shepherds have a responsibility to notify other shepherds when their sheep persistently wander outside their immediate “fold.” This would appear only proper, but this simple gesture often goes overlooked by shepherds. Third, shepherds should seek to

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pull sheep into their “flock” through membership or push sheep back into the “fold” from which they originally came.

I believe the key here is to note how the New Testament does not know anything about shepherd-less sheep or sheep-less shepherds. The two are inseparably linked. This appears clear from Mark 6:34.

As you and I consider this biblical idea, may we ask ourselves what our relationship is to the Chief Shepherd, His lesser shepherds, the sheep at large and those who are specifically identified in a geographical location? May God continue to sharpen us as we come to understand this necessary relationship.