

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST
Christ The Shepherd of The Church
Lesson # 18

Throughout history the church has been plagued by the ideas of men. Too often the Church has forgotten it has a Great Shepherd, the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, who watches over His Church, to protect, guide, and feed it. But men often ignore the Great Shepherd's instructions and seek to shepherd the sheep in a way that seems right in their own eyes leading to catastrophe. Thus the church has been plagued with man-made forms of governing the church, unqualified leaders, unbiblical philosophies and on and on it goes. In recent years we have seen the "Third Wave" charismatic movement, the "spiritual warfare" movement, the "experiencing God" movement, the "seeker sensitive" movement, the "church growth" movement, the "emergent church" movement, and soon there will be another, followed by another, until finally Christ returns in glory.

Why does this happen? It happens because Satan labors to steer the church away from its Head and Shepherd Jesus Christ. It happens because men are unwilling to let Christ shepherd His Church. It happens because men think they know how to shepherd the church better than Jesus. What is needed is to go back to the Word of God and see what the Scriptures say about Jesus the Great Shepherd and Head of the church. For this lesson we will look at Christ the Shepherd of the Church and next lesson we will look at Christ the Head of the Church.

I. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS RELATED TO SHEPHERD

A. Shepherd

1. *The NASB Topical Index*: In the OT the term shepherd is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning "to feed" or "to pasture." The NT Greek term translated "shepherd" simply means "one who feeds and cares for the flock." In the biblical period and in antiquity in general, shepherding was a common occupation. Because of the dryness of the ground in Palestine, the flocks had to move about for food. This, coupled with the danger of wild beasts and robbers, made shepherding a lowly but independent and responsible job. The nature of the task involving provision, guarding, and caring for the weak of the flock contributed to the figurative use of "shepherd" for rulers of the people in the ancient Near East.¹
2. *The New Bible Dictionary*: "Biblical shepherds may be literal or metaphorical: those in charge of sheep; those also, divine or mortal, in charge of men."²

¹*The NASB Topical Index*, (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1998).

²*New Bible Dictionary*, (InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962), 1092.

B. Role of Literal Shepherds

1. A shepherd seeks to know his sheep (**Jn. 10:14**).
2. A shepherd goes before them, leading them (**Psa. 77:20**).
3. A shepherd seeks good pasture for his sheep (**Psa. 23:2**).
4. A shepherd counts his sheep as they return from pasturing (**Jer. 33:13**).
5. A shepherd watches over his sheep to protect them (**Lk. 2:8**).
6. A shepherd tenderly cares for the health of his flock (**Gen. 33:13**).
7. A shepherd defends the sheep from wolves and wild beasts (**I Sam. 17:34-36**).
8. A shepherd seeks out the lost sheep and finds them (**Lk. 15:4-5**).
9. How does the role of the literal shepherd apply to the role of leaders in the church? Discuss each point above and what it would look like as a task for an elder in the church.

C. Equipment of Literal Shepherds

1. Shepherds had a pouch to keep food and supplies in, like the one David put five stones in before slaying Goliath (**I Sam. 17:40**).
2. Shepherds had a sling to sling stones (**I Sam. 17:40**).
3. Shepherds carried a staff usually hooked at one end to grab or rescue sheep (**Psa. 23:4**).
4. Shepherds carried a rod usually strait and used to protect the sheep (**Psa. 23:4**).
5. Shepherds dwelt in tents (**Isa. 38:12**).
6. Shepherds wore a mantle made of sheep skin or woven wool (**Jer. 43:12; Mt. 7:15**).
7. Literal shepherds had equipment to do their job. What must the figurative shepherds of God's church have or possess in order to shepherd the flock of God?

D. Figurative Shepherds

1. *God* is a shepherd (**Psa. 23; 77:20; 80:1**).
2. *Christ* is a shepherd (**Jn. 10:1-33; I Pet. 2:25**).
3. *Kings and Leaders of the People* are shepherds (**Isa 44:28; Jer 6:3; 49:19**).
4. *Elders, Pastors, and Overseers of the Church* are shepherds (**Jer 23:4; Acts 20:17, 28; I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; I Pet. 5:1-3**)
 - a. Why does the church need shepherds (or pastors)?
 - b. In one sentence how would you describe the job of shepherds in the church?
5. *Bad shepherds*: Who do things their own way (**Isa 56:11**); who lead people astray (**Jer. 50:6**); feed themselves but not the flock (**Ezek. 34:2,10**); allow the sheep to be slaughtered, are foolish, don't care for the perishing sheep, don't seek the scattered sheep, don't heal the broken sheep, don't sustain the healthy sheep, but devour the sheep (**Zech. 11:7,8,15-17**); are thieves, robbers, who will not lay down their lives for the sheep, but flee when the wolf comes allowing the sheep to be slaughtered (**Jn. 10:12**).

II. THOUGHTS TO PONDER

- A. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*: Shepherds were thus providers, guides, protectors and constant companions of sheep. They were also figures of authority and leadership to the animals under their care. So close is the connection between shepherd and sheep that to this day Middle Eastern shepherds can divide flocks that have mingled at a well or during the night simply by calling their sheep, who follow their shepherd's voice.³
- B. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: Sheep are curious but dumb animals, often unable to find their way home even if the sheepfold is within sight. Knowing this fault, shepherds never take their eyes off their wandering sheep (Ps. 32:8). Often sheep will wander into a briar patch or fall over a cliff in the rugged

³*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, c1998), 782.

Palestinian hills. The shepherds tenderly search for their sheep and carry them to safety (Luke 15:6).⁴

- C. *Smith's Bible Dictionary*: The office of the eastern shepherd, as described in the Bible, was attended with much hardship, and even danger. He was exposed to the extremes of heat and cold, Gen. 31:40; his food frequently consisted of the precarious supplies afforded by nature, such as the fruit of the "sycamore" or Egyptian fig, Amos 7:14, the "husks" of the carob tree, Luke 15:16, and perchance the locusts and wild honey which supported the Baptist, Matt. 3:4; he had to encounter the attacks of wild beasts, occasionally of the larger species, such as lions, wolves, panthers, and bears, 1 Sam. 17:34; Isa. 31:4; Jer. 5:6; Amos 3:12; nor was he free from the risk of robbers or predatory hordes. Gen. 31:39.⁵

III. KEY SCRIPTURES RELATING TO CHRIST AS SHEPHERD

- A. **Psa. 23:1-6** The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. 3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- B. **Isa. 40:9-11** Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" 10 Behold, the Lord God will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. 11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.
- C. **Ezek. 34:12-24** "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. 13 "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. 14 "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will

⁴*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1995).

⁵*Smith's Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 “I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord God. 16 “I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment. 17 “As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats. 18 ‘Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet? 19 ‘As for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!’ ” 20 Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them, “Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 “Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad, 22 therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. 23 “Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. 24 “And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken.

- D. **Zech. 13:7** “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate,” Declares the Lord of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones.
- E. **Mt. 26:31-32** Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’ 32 “But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”
- F. **Lk. 15:1-7** Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” 3 So He told them this parable, saying, 4 “What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 “When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ 7 “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.
- G. **Jn. 10:1-6, 11-16, 24-33** “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 “But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 “To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep

by name and leads them out. 4 “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 “A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. . .

11 “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 “He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 “He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. . .

24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” 25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. 26 “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30 “I and the Father are one.” 31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” 33 The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”

- H. **Heb. 13:20-21** Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- I. **I Pet. 2:25** For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.
- J. **I Pet. 5:1-5** 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. 5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

IV. ERRORS CONCERNING CHRIST AND HIS UNDERSHEPHERDS

- A. The Pope is the shepherd of the church.
- B. The Senior Pastor is the shepherd of the church.
- C. We don't need to be part of a local church because Christ is our Great Shepherd.
- D. Being an undershepherd of Christ only involves preaching and teaching.
- E. Having a shepherd's heart is to tolerate sin in people's lives and seek to comfort them in their rebellion against God.
- F. Being a good undershepherd of Christ does not require the ability to preach or teach.
- G. True shepherds, like Christ, seek to make their sheep feel good.
- H. Good shepherds learn to shepherd by listening to those they shepherd and following their advice.
- I. Good shepherds must have a certain kind of personality.

V. APPLICATION OF CHRIST AS SHEPHERD

- A. Since Christ is the Great Shepherd of the sheep we must follow Him as a priority.
- B. We must never follow one of Christ's undershepherds who are not following Christ the Great Shepherd.
- C. Leaders in the church must model their shepherding after Christ.
- D. We must run from those who teach, think, or act like they are "The Shepherd" of God's church.
- E. We can rest assured that Christ will shepherd His church even if human undershepherds fail.
- F. Sheep hear the shepherd's voice and follow him, therefore if we are Christ's sheep we must hear His voice and follow.

- G. We must be suspicious of those who claim to be Christ's sheep but do not hear His voice or follow Him.
- H. Knowing what the Great Shepherd is like, we should pray for Christ's under-shepherds that they would be conformed to the Great Shepherd.
- I. When seeking to make decisions for the church, ministry programs, priorities in worship service, etc., we must seek out the voice of the Great Shepherd found in the Word of God, not turn to ourselves and our own ideas.
- J. Since Christ is a perfect shepherd, we know that whatever He allows in our life, it is what is best for us, even though it may be painful and hard to understand.

When businessman Allen Emery was in the wool business, he once spent an evening with a shepherd on the Texas prairie. During the night, the long wail of coyotes pierced the air. The shepherd's dogs growled and peered into the darkness. The sheep, which had been sleeping, lumbered to their feet, alarmed, bleating pitifully. The shepherd tossed more logs onto the fire, and the flames shot up. In the glow, Allen looked out and saw thousands of little lights. He realized those were reflections of the fire in the eyes of the sheep.

“In the midst of danger,” he observed, “the sheep were not looking out into the darkness but were keeping their eyes set in the direction of their safety, looking toward the shepherd. I couldn't help but think of Hebrews 12: *“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”*”⁶

⁶Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 297.