

## God's Expectations of His Shepherds

### A Topical Lesson

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#### I. Background and Introduction

- a. We are taking a break from our Acts series today with Chuck being out of town. However, we will return to some of the things we have been studying in Acts as we dig into the lesson today focused on the role of the New Testament elder.
- b. This past year, we have recognized that if we want to be a New Testament church, ultimately, we need to appoint elders (and deacons). This lesson will focus on the elders.
  - i. On Paul's first missionary journey, he makes this loop with Barnabas, sailing to Cyprus, then to Perga, going inland into Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe starting churches, preaching the gospel and making many disciples.
  - ii. They then head back the way they came and immediately appointed elders!
    1. "... strengthening the souls of the disciples exhorting them to continue in the faith.... So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." (**Acts 15:22-23**)
  - iii. Read **Titus 1:5-11**
    1. Paul instructs Titus to "set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city...."
    2. Paul then describes the qualifications. (See also **1 Timothy 3**.)
  - iv. Appointing elders as church leaders seems to be an important part of building strong, healthy, New Testament churches.
  - v. If we want to have lots of healthy New Testament churches, we will need lots of Biblical elders!
- c. I've aspired to be an elder for many years, but always envisioned this to be something that would happen "someday in the future."
  - i. "This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work." (**1 Timothy 3:1**)
  - ii. Yet, here we are, talking, praying, fasting about the need to appoint elders, and I'm one of the two oldest guys in the room!

- d. Over the past months, I've been studying what the Scriptures teach about elders, their role, expectations of their leadership, etc.
  - i. In so doing, I am realizing that the role and expectations of church elders that I see in the Scriptures do not line up with what I have experienced in churches I was part of in the past.
  - ii. In my study, I have also come to a greater appreciation and respect for those who aspire to this role, with its significant expectations and spiritual bar.
  - iii. My desire is to sort out what God expects of me as a church leader.
  - iv. I'm asking myself several questions:
    - 1. What is the Biblical role of the elder/shepherd?
    - 2. Who qualifies? Do I qualify?
    - 3. Am I prepared to fulfill this role? (count the cost)
    - 4. Do I want to do this?
  - v. Also, studying how the early Church understood the role of the elders/shepherds.
    - 1. (Thank you, David Sanabria, for pulling together 75 pages of quotes referencing elders/shepherds!)
- e. I have three goals for today's lesson:
  - i. Present a clearer picture (than I have had) of the Biblical role of the elder/bishop/overseer/shepherd. (Greek words used interchangeably – **Acts 20, 1 Peter 5, Titus 1**) Why?
    - 1. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account." (**Hebrews 11:17**)
    - 2. See Chuck Pike's lesson *Suffering Abuse from Church Leaders*. (<https://www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/topical-lessons/lessons/suffering-abuse-from-church-leaders>)
    - 3. Proper expectations
      - a. Each of us, as Christians and part of the body of Christ, should expect nothing more and nothing less than what God expects of the leaders of His church.
  - ii. To inspire men to aspire to the roles of elders and deacons.

1. We need lots of church leaders because we need lots of churches!
2. “aspire”: to direct one’s hope or ambition toward something.
  - a. As men, let us not aspire to succeed in worldly pursuits (our jobs, hobbies, etc.), but to Godly leadership of His Church!
- iii. Help us all to imitate Jesus, the Good Shepherd.
  1. How did Jesus lead/rule the Church? (This should fill us with gratitude and inspire us to imitate His example!)
  2. As His disciples, we are all called to imitate Him. Being a good shepherd is not limited to Chuck and David, who are “up for church eldership”!
  3. Read **Matthew 25:31-46**
    - a. Starting at the end: the Day of Judgment for every one of us when the Good Shepherd returns.
    - b. We will be judged by the standards of the Good Shepherd: who owned the cares of the weak, broken and needy.
    - c. So, let’s look at good and bad examples of shepherds in Scripture, so we can each prepare for that Last Day!

## II. Wicked Shepherds

- a. Read **Ezekiel 34:1-10**
- b. We can learn from the bad examples! Qualities of the wicked shepherds we do not want to imitate:
  - i. Looking after themselves, own needs.
  - ii. Eating the sheep, not feeding the sheep.
  - iii. Not strengthening the weak.
  - iv. Not reviving the sick.
  - v. Not bandaging the broken.
  - vi. Not bringing back the misled.
  - vii. Not seeking the lost.

- viii. Not preparing the strong for labor
- c. The result:
  - i. The sheep (God's people) were scattered
  - ii. Became food/plunder for the wild animals
  - iii. God is against the shepherds, will remove the shepherds, and rescues the sheep from the shepherds!
  - iv. God is angry. This is unacceptable.
- d. God has significant expectations for His shepherds.
  - i. It is a role with responsibilities clearly laid out. Clear job description with a scorecard! These guys failed and were removed.

### III. The Good Shepherd

- a. Read **Ezekiel 34:11-16**
  - i. God Himself will step in and replace the wicked shepherds. God will be the Shepherd.
  - ii. The qualities of the Good Shepherd
    - 1. Searches for the sheep (in darkness) and cares for them.
    - 2. Feeds them.
    - 3. Brings back the misled.
    - 4. Binds the broken.
    - 5. Strengthens the fallen.
    - 6. Protects the strong.
- b. Read **Ezekiel 34:21-25**
  - i. God will "raise up one Shepherd over them, and He will tend them, even My Servant David."
    - 1. A prophecy of Jesus' resurrection!
  - ii. So encouraging! *But, do people want God to be their shepherd?*
    - 1. "Now establish a king for us to judge us like all the rest of the nations.' But this was evil in the eyes of Samuel when they said, **'Give us a king to judge us.' So Samuel prayed to the Lord.**

**And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in whatever they might say to you, for they have not rejected you, but rather they have rejected Me, to bring to naught My reign over them.'" (1 Samuel 8:5-7)**

2. "But today you have rejected God, who Himself is your Savior from all your adversities and tribulations." (**1 Samuel 10:19**)
  3. The people reject God and ask for a human king like all the other nations.
  4. They want a human king, not the invisible God, to be their savior, king, judge, and shepherd.
- c. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who fulfills the **Ezekiel 34** prophecy.
- i. Read **John 10:1-18**
  - ii. Qualities of the Good Shepherd for God's leaders to imitate so they can point others to THE Good Shepherd.
    1. Jesus knows the Father (shepherds must know God/His Word)
    2. Knows the sheep and is known by the sheep (takes time/less secular work!)
    3. Leads them, and they follow. (The buck stops with the shepherds)
    4. The Good Shepherd is courageous. He does not run away from the wolf/persecution!
      - a. "Thus ought every servant of God to feel and act, even one in an inferior place, that he may come to have a more important one, if he has made some upward step by his endurance of persecution. But when persons in authority themselves—I mean the very deacons, and presbyters, and bishops—take to flight, how will a layman be able to see with what view it was said, Flee from city to city? Thus, too, with the leaders turning their backs, who of the common rank will hope to persuade men to stand firm in the battle? Most assuredly a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, according to the word of Moses, when the Lord Christ had not as yet been revealed, but was already shadowed forth in himself: "If you destroy this people," he says, "destroy me also along with it." But Christ, confirming these foreshadowings Himself,

adds: "The bad shepherd is he who, on seeing the wolf, flees, and leaves the sheep to be torn in pieces."

- i. Tertullian of Carthage, *De Fuga in Persecutione* 11 (213 C.E.; ANF 4.122), may have been an elder in Carthage, North Africa.

5. Preaches righteousness, is the ultimate Watchman

a. Read **Ezekiel 33:1-7**

- i. The good shepherds blow the trumpet, warn the people when they go astray
- ii. God holds these leaders accountable for speaking the truth to the people.
- iii. God holds the people (and leaders) accountable for obeying!

**IV. Paul's Example as a Shepherd**

a. Read **Acts 20:25-38**

- b. Paul's final words to the church leaders from Ephesus. He must have shared with them the things he felt were most important.
- c. Paul is not calling all the lead evangelists together! Also, the elders are NOT a board of directors delegating day-to-day affairs of ministry to the church CEO.
  - i. In the denomination I belonged to for many years, most of the churches never adopted the Biblical role of elders that I see in the Scriptures. Instead, they demoted the role of elder and elevated the role of "evangelist" to lead the church.
    - 1. Elders, if appointed at all, were used as an overseeing "board of directors" (like a nonprofit corporation in the world). Elders were also used for significant spiritual counseling issues.
    - 2. The evangelists would do most of the teaching and preaching and, for all practical purposes, direct the affairs of the Church.
      - a. The evangelists would often not meet the Biblical character requirements of elders as described in **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**, even though there were older men who did meet these requirements.

3. The term “evangelist” is only mentioned twice in the New Testament.
  - a. In **Acts 21:8**, in reference to Philip, one of the seven appointed to a deacon-type role in **Acts 6** and who proclaimed the Gospel, including to the Ethiopian eunuch in **Acts 8**.
  - b. In **2 Timothy 4:5**, in reference to Timothy.
    - i. While Timothy, carrying out “the work of an evangelist”, played an important role in proclaiming the gospel, it is clear from Paul’s example in Acts that he prioritized the appointment of elders/shepherds to lead churches.
    - ii. Paul commanded Titus “to appoint elders in every city”. These elders were required to meet specific requirements of character and ability (**1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9**).
  - ii. I have seen other churches/denominations create leadership positions to oversee the local church (“senior pastor”, “prophets”, etc.).
    1. It seems to me that these can be attempts to bypass the Biblical model God has for church leadership, including the expectation that older men rise up and meet the Biblical requirements to serve as elders of the Church.
  - d. Paul’s example and instruction to the Ephesian elders regarding their leadership role:
    - i. “innocent of the blood of all men”
      1. Shares the whole counsel of God
      2. Warns the people for three years
      3. Calls all the elders “to watch”
    - ii. “Take heed of yourselves and to all the flock”
      1. Paul’s manner of life
      2. Paul’s humility (many tears and trials)
      3. Coveted no one’s silver, gold or apparel (provided for himself)

e. Early Christian quotes about the character of the good elders/shepherds

- i. "So appoint for yourselves overseers and assistants [deacons] worthy of the Lord, men who are **humble-minded and not avaricious**, but are **true and tried**, for they themselves also render you the service of the prophets and teachers. So do not despise them, for they are your honourable men along with the prophets and teachers."

1. Unknown, Didache 15.1-1 (70-120 C.E.; AFAT 17 / ANF 7.381)

- ii. "Also the presbyters must be compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, looking after the sick, not neglecting widow or orphan or one that is poor; but 'always taking thought for what is honorable in the sight of God and of men,' refraining from all anger, partiality, unjust judgment, keeping far from all love of money, not hastily believing evil of anyone, nor being severe in judgment, knowing that we all owe the debt of sin."

1. Polycarp of Smyrna (Bishop and martyr of Smyrna, a disciple of John), Philippians 5.2-6.3 (120 C.E.; LCC 1.133-134 / ANF 1.34).

- iii. "Such a one is in reality a presbyter of the Church, and a true minister (deacon) of the will of God, if he do and teach what is the Lord's; not as being ordained by men, nor regarded righteous because a presbyter, but enrolled in the presbyterate because righteous."

1. Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis 6.13 (190 C.E.; ANF 2.504-505)

- iv. "I shall at once go on, then, to exhibit the peculiarities of the Christian society, that, as I have refuted the evil charged against it, I may point out its positive good.... The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God."

1. Tertullian of Carthage, The Apology 30.1-7 (197 C.E.; ANF 3.46 / FOTC 40.98-99)

- v. "In the light of this [that the apostles had appointed elders and deacons], we view it as a breach of justice to remove from their ministry those who were appointed either by them or later on and with the whole church's consent, by others of the proper standing, and who, long enjoying everybody's approval, **have ministered to Christ's flock faultlessly, humbly, quietly, and unassumingly**. For we shall be guilty of no slight sin if we eject from the episcopate men who have offered the sacrifices with innocence and holiness. Happy, indeed, are those presbyters who have already passed on, and who ended a life of fruitfulness with their task complete. For they need not



fear that anyone will remove them from their secure positions. **But you, we observe, have removed a number of people, despite their good conduct, from a ministry they have fulfilled with honor and integrity.** Your contention and rivalry, brothers, thus touches matters that bear on our salvation.”

1. Clement of Rome (Bishop of Rome), 1 Clement 44.1-45.1 (107 C.E.; LCC 1.63-64 / ANF 9.242). Writing to and rebuking the church in Corinth, whose elders had been ousted by a minority faction of believers.

## V. Peter’s Example as a Shepherd

### a. Read **John 21:15-19**

- i. Do you love me? Then feed my lambs. Be a good shepherd.
- ii. Shepherding My flock will take you to a place you do not want to go (your death).

### b. Read **1 Peter 5:1-5**.

- i. Peter has just written about facing suffering as a Christian.
- ii. Peter tells the elders:
  1. Serve willingly, eagerly.
  2. Not being “lords” over the flock, but examples.
  3. The flock is something entrusted to you. Very precious.
  4. There is a reward for this challenging labor!
- iii. Peter fulfilled Jesus’ request to feed His sheep. Not only did Peter become a tremendous shepherd/elder, but he also set an example and taught other men to become good shepherds of Jesus’ flock!
  1. Jesus must have been so encouraged and pleased. He knew Peter could do it!

## VI. John’s Example as a Shepherd

- a. Read story from *Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?* (see attached).
- b. Insights I gleaned from John’s remarkable example as a good shepherd:
  - i. John appoints bishops/elders “to set in order whole Churches”, ordaining those “marked out by the Spirit”.

- ii. John entrusts the church (and even individual Christians) to the new bishop/elder.
- iii. Elders aren't perfect. They need help at times.
  - 1. "Time passed, and some necessity having emerged, they send again for John."
  - 2. The bishop groans and mourns, bursts into tears about the lost young man.
  - 3. John's rebuke: "It was a fine guard of a brother's soul I left!"
- iv. John shows how to be a good shepherd by his example.
  - 1. John lays down his own life to bring back the stray lamb.
  - 2. John's love, righteousness, courage – brings this wicked robber to tears, running in fear and shame from this 80-90-year-old elder!
- v. The elders' weapons: fasting, praying, exhortation.
- vi. The elder John calls people to repentance (the bishop, the young man).

## VII. Miscellaneous Thoughts About Shepherds

- a. The role of the New Testament bishops (and deacons) as a fulfillment of prophecy?
  - i. "And so the apostles, after receiving their orders and being fully convinced by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and assured by God's word, went out in the confidence of the Holy Spirit to preach the good news that God's Kingdom was about to come. **They preached in country and city, and appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this any novelty, for Scripture had mentioned bishops and deacons long before. For this is what Scripture says somewhere: "I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith."** [Isaiah 60:17]
  - 1. Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 40.1-42.5 (107 C.E.; LCC 1.62-63 / ANF 9.241-242)
  - 2. We need elders, and we need deacons to lead God's people – roles that some early Christians saw foretold by the prophets long ago!

- b. Elders can go bad/go astray
  - i. “Also from among yourselves [the Ephesian elders] men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” (**Acts 20:30**)
  - ii. “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” (**1 Timothy 5:19-20**)
  - iii. “I have been exceedingly grieved on account of Valens, who was sometime a presbyter among you, because he so forgot the office that was given him. I warn you, therefore, to refrain from the love of money and be pure and truthful. ‘Shun evil of every kind.’ For how shall he who cannot govern himself in these things teach another?”
    - 1. Polycarp of Smyrna, Philipians 11.1-4 (120 C.E.; LCC 1.135-136 / ANF 1.35)
- c. The apostles picked elders/bishops to preserve the gospel (traditions/commands/way of life)
  - i. “But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] **which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches**, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth....
  - ii. **For they [the apostles] were desirous that these men [bishops] should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men; which men, if they discharged their functions honestly, would be a great boon [to the Church], but if they should fall away, the direst calamity.**
    - 1. Irenaeus of Gaul, Against Heresies 3.pref.-3.4.3 (180 C.E.; ANF 1.414-417) , a bishop of the church in Lyon.
    - 2. Role of elders today: to take us back to the original faith and not let the church stray from this!
- d. Three traits/abilities of an effective elder (according to Irenaeus!):
  - i. “Where, therefore, the gifts of the Lord have been placed, there it behoves us to learn the truth, [namely,] from those who possess that succession of the Church which is from the apostles, and among whom exists that which is sound and blameless in conduct, as well as that

which is unadulterated and incorrupt in speech. For these [church elders] also:

1. preserve this faith of ours in one God who created all things;
2. and they increase that love [which we have] for the Son of God... and
3. they expound the Scriptures to us without danger, neither blaspheming God, nor dishonouring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets.”

a. Irenaeus of Gaul, Against Heresies 4.26.1-4.26.5 (180 C.E.; ANF 1.498).

e. I am grateful that we see a plurality of elders throughout the NT.

- i. Few men have all these gifts, strengths, and experience to meet all these expectations!

## VIII. Conclusion

a. Following the Good Shepherd is the duty of every follower of Jesus!

- i. **Matthew 25** – each of us will be judged at the Last Day as to how we loved others, took care of them.
- ii. Be inspired by the promise to those who imitate the Good Shepherd!
- iii. God is so pleased as His people lay down their lives for one another.

b. We need many men who aspire to be church elders and deacons.

- i. We need lots of churches, therefore lots of men who aspire and become shepherds and deacons.

ii. Act and prepare now!

1. Promised blessing if you do.

- a. “And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has....” (**Luke 12:42-44**)

2. Warning if you do not!

- a. “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.” **(Luke 12:47)**

## Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?

Clement of Alexandria, Salvation of the Rich Man 42 (190 C.E.; ANF 2.603-604 / LCL 92.356-365)

And that you may be still more confident, that repenting thus truly there remains for you a sure hope of salvation, listen to a tale, which is not a tale but a narrative, handed down and committed to the custody of memory, about the Apostle John. For when, on the tyrant's death, he returned to Ephesus from the isle of Patmos, he went away, being invited, to the contiguous territories of the nations, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, there to ordain such as were marked out by the Spirit.

Having come to one of the cities not far off (the name of which some give), and having put the brethren to rest in other matters, at last, looking to the bishop appointed, and seeing a youth, powerful in body, comely in appearance, and ardent, said, "This (youth) I commit to you in all earnestness, in the presence of the Church, and with Christ as witness." And on his accepting and promising all, he gave the same injunction and testimony. And John set out for Ephesus. And the presbyter taking home the youth committed to him, reared, kept, cherished, and finally enlightened him by baptism.<sup>1</sup>

After this he relaxed his stricter care and guardianship, under the idea that the seal of the Lord<sup>2</sup> he had set on him was a complete protection to him. But on the youth's obtaining premature freedom, some youths of his age, idle, dissolute, and adepts in evil courses, corrupted him. First they enticed him by many costly entertainments; then afterwards by night issuing forth for highway robbery, they took him along with them. Then they dared to execute together something greater.

And he by degrees got accustomed; and from greatness of nature, when he had gone aside from the right path, and like a hard-mouthed and powerful horse, had taken the bit between his teeth, rushed with all the more force down into the depths. And having entirely despaired of salvation in God, he no longer meditated what was insignificant, but having perpetrated some great exploit, now that he was once lost, he made up his mind to a like fate with the rest. Taking them and forming a band of robbers, he was the prompt captain of the bandits, the fiercest, the bloodiest, the cruelest.

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<sup>1</sup> Gk. "ἐφώτισε"; Lit. "enlightened him"; "Enlightenment" or "illumination" was a common euphemism for baptism in the early church (cp. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.61)

<sup>2</sup> I.e. baptism; The early Church understood the "seal" referred to by Paul, in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, to be a reference to baptism.

Time passed, and some necessity having emerged, they sent again for John. He, when he had settled the other matters on account of which he came, said, "Come now, O bishop, restore to us the deposit which I and the Saviour committed to thee in the face of the Church over which you preside, as witness." The bishop was at first confounded, thinking that it was a false charge about money which he did not get; and he could neither believe the allegation regarding what he had not, nor disbelieve John. But when he said "I demand the young man, and the soul of the brother," the old man, groaning deeply, and bursting into tears, said, "He is dead." "How and what kind of death?" "He is dead," he said, "to God. For he turned wicked and abandoned, and at last a robber; and now he has taken possession of the mountain in front of the church, along with a band like him."

Rending, therefore, his clothes, and striking his head with great lamentation, the apostle said, "It was a fine guard of a brother's soul I left!<sup>3</sup> But let a horse be brought me, and let some one be my guide on the way." He rode away, just as he was, straight from the church. On coming to the place, he is arrested by the robbers' outpost; neither fleeing nor entreating, but crying, "It was for this I came. Lead me to your captain;" who meanwhile was waiting, all armed as he was. But when he recognized John as he advanced, he turned, ashamed, to flight. The other followed with all his might, forgetting his age, crying, "Why, my son, do you flee from me, your father, unarmed, old? Son, pity me. Fear not; you have still hope of life. I will give account to Christ for you.<sup>4</sup> If need be, I will willingly endure thy death, as the Lord did death for us. For you I will surrender my life. Stand, believe; Christ has sent me."

And he, when he heard, first stood, looking down; then threw down his arms, then trembled and wept bitterly.<sup>5</sup> And on the old man approaching, he embraced him, speaking for himself with lamentations as he could, and baptized a second time with tears, concealing only his right hand. The other pledging, and assuring him on oath that he would find forgiveness for himself from the Saviour,<sup>6</sup> beseeching and falling on his knees, and kissing his right hand itself, as now purified by repentance, led him back to the church.

Then by supplicating with copious prayers, and striving along with him in continual fastings, and subduing his mind by various utterances of words, did not depart, as they say, till he restored him to the Church, presenting in him a great example of true repentance and a great token of regeneration, a trophy of the resurrection for which we hope; when at

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<sup>3</sup> Cp. Hebrews 13:17

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Hebrews 13:17

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62

<sup>6</sup> Cp. John 20:23

the end of the world, the angels, radiant with joy, hymning and opening the heavens, shall receive into the celestial abodes those who truly repent; and before all, the Saviour Himself goes to meet them, welcoming them; holding forth the shadowless, ceaseless light; conducting them, to the Father's bosom, to eternal life, to the kingdom of heaven.