

Passing the Torch

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John 10:1-16, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

The ministry involves the handling of fire for the minister is responsible to properly handle the Word of God. Jehovah said, “Is not my word like as a fire” (Jer. 23:29)? Today there is a passing of the torch or the fire of God’s Word in this assembly. There is the fiery law that condemns sin (Deut. 33:2) and there is the Christ who said of the gospel, “I am come to send (or cast) fire on the earth” (Luke 12:49). Only Christ could purge sin! The fire that Christ cast on the earth is refused by this world. The world seeks to marginalize or extinguish God’s Word and bar it from the culture—“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Ps. 2:2-3). What is God’s response? He laughs and will hold them in derision (Ps. 2:4) for His fire burns on in truth and power. John the Baptist said that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:3-4). “The gospel part of the Word is like fire because the entrance of the Word gives light to sinners whereby they see their impurity, impotence and the insufficiency of their own righteousness, which is like filthy rags in God’s sight; they see that the only way of salvation is through Christ who is the Light. The fire of the Word begins to burn in conviction by the Holy Spirit’s work inflaming them to embrace Christ, love God and one another. This fiery Word torches the hopes of the ungodly and either hardens or softens their hearts thus Christ calls it fire (Luke 12:49). Our God is like His Word—“For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29)” [Paraphrase of John Gill].

Before the creation of man, one reads the following words—“And there was not a man to till the ground” (Gen. 2:5). The Creator’s intention for man was that he was to be an agrarian or a farmer. Cain was a worker of the ground (Gen. 4:2). Early on we see animal husbandry. Abel was a keeper of sheep (Gen. 4:2). This way of life was presented in the genesis of Scripture. God often takes that way of life to make spiritual analogies to help us to understand eternal things.

God’s eternal Son used farming analogies in many forms of instruction; for example, He did so in parables. On one occasion He said, “Behold, a sower went forth to sow” (Matt. 13:3). Then Jesus spoke of what happened when seeds fell by the wayside, upon stony places, among thorns and on good ground. The seed was a picture of the “Word” of God—there are varied results from sowing the Word of God. Jesus followed that parable with one of a man who sowed good seed in his field and while he slept an enemy sowed tares in the wheat—meaning there will be opposition and false imitations of the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:24 ff). The Lord of the harvest will separate the wheat from the tares. Then Jesus used another parable of the kingdom of heaven being like a grain of mustard seed sowed in a field—the message was that the kingdom of God will be victorious (Matt. 13:31 ff).

The sacred Word says that men think of themselves as being right in their own eyes, but Jehovah considers their hearts (Prov. 21:2). A few verses later we are told that the plowing of the wicked is sin—the fall impacts all a person does because of a faulty mind, heart or motive. Death toward God is terrible. Isaiah said that we were all like sheep who have gone astray and that Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter on behalf of His sheep (Isa. 53:6, 7). Consider one of the ways the Lord Jesus revealed the cost of redemption. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.... I lay down my life for (or in the stead of) the sheep” (John 10:14, 15). Here is the clear revelation of substitutionary atonement.

When the end comes we are told: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:31-32). The goats go into everlasting punishment and the sheep into life eternal.

Perhaps one of the saddest statements in the inspired Word of God was, “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching ... and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.... But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted (or were distressed), and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:35-36). What drew out the Lord Jesus’ compassion? The condition of His sheep being fearful and without a shepherd! Jesus then spoke to His disciples of a plentiful harvest that was short on workers. He told them to pray to the Lord of the harvest for the solution; ask Him for laborers Jesus said (Matt. 9:37-38).

The local church is the earthly place where the Good Shepherd calls His under-shepherds to care for His flock so they will not be as sheep having no shepherd. Christ is the Chief Shepherd and the Good Shepherd and the Great Shepherd who is the head of the flock (Col. 1:18, 24). We will be considering the following: [1] The local church as a purchased flock. [2] The local church as a tended flock. [3] The local church as a responsible flock.

I. Consider the Local Church as a Purchased Flock. They are the flock of which Christ is to be the head.

A. The Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd gave His life for or in the place of the sheep (John 10:11). These sheep He added to His flock by substitutionary atonement (Matt. 1:21). What a redemption

price! God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem His sheep that they might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4-5). This adoption means to be placed as an adult son in the family of God.

B. The sheep were adopted into His family at great cost. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:6-7; Rom. 8:15). The depth of divine love is evident in the great cost God the Father was willing to pay. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” (1 Thess. 5:9-10).

II. Consider the Local Church as a Tended Flock.

Since the Lord loves His sheep and paid such a high price for them their care is of utmost importance to Him as His Word demonstrates. This is why he calls men to be under-shepherds of His flock. His shepherds enter by the door and He is that Door. Jesus declared that He is the door of entrance into the eternal presence of His Father. He chooses those who would tend His sheep. “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). Tyndale translated the last part of that verse that he gave some “some shepherds, some teachers.” Our word “pastor” is simply Latin for “shepherd.” Christ is the door of the shepherds as well as the sheep! Under shepherds need to be born again by the grace of God.

What an awesome responsibility and blessing it is to be chosen to be a pastor or shepherd. There were qualifications revealed for their identification to the flock (1 Tim. 3:1 ff.; Titus 1:5 ff.). Since Christ is the Great Shepherd He calls under-shepherds or pastors.

What are they to do? How are they to shepherd?

A. The shepherd is to labor in the Word and doctrine—The Lord said, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the *word and doctrine*” (1 Tim. 5:17; 3:2). What does the shepherd do? He holds “fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able *by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers* (the opposition)” (Titus 1:9). The shepherd is to “*Preach the word*; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and *doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2).

B. The shepherd is to be a man of prayer—The Lord’s servants during the widows’ dispute indicated that it was not reasonable to “leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2); so honest men were chosen to dispense charity. Then the ministers of the word declared, “But we will give ourselves continually *to prayer*, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). What an example Christ Jesus was of one praying and ministering? Consider the prayers of Paul recorded in his inspired writings (Rom. 1:8-12; 15:5-7; 16:25-27; 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; 12:7-10; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:8-11; Col. 1:9-12; 1 Thess. 3:11-13; 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:5; etc.).

C. The shepherd is to mature and edify the body of Christ—Shepherds were given “For the *perfecting* (or literally *repairing*) of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the *edifying* (*building up*) of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Paul urged them to “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).

D. The shepherd is to guard or protect the souls of the flock—Obedience was to be given to those with spiritual authority “for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb. 13:17). Shepherds must be attentive to the protection of the souls of the Lord’s sheep for they will be held

accountable. The spiritual care of these must not be neglected. This is not a case of lording “it over God’s heritage.” It is the hireling that abandons the sheep when the wolf comes. The hireling flies because he does not care for the sheep (John 10:12-13).

E. The shepherd is to be an example to the flock of God—No they are not to be overbearing but they are to be exemplary. Shepherds are not to be tyrannical but a type of leader that makes a good example. “Neither as being lords over [God’s] heritage, but being ensamples (*tupoi*—a pattern to be followed by the flock) to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3).

F. The shepherd is to feed the church of God purchased by the blood of Christ—Paul’s charge to the elders of Ephesus was “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). The feeding or tending is to be the constant or norm. Three times Peter was reminded to show his love and “Feed my lambs,” “Feed (or shepherd) my sheep (or lambs)” and “Feed my sheep.” It meant to feed as the Lord’s herdsman (John 21:15-17).

G. The shepherd should lead the flock as the Shepherd the Christ Jesus. The very character of the shepherd is to lead the flock safely—“The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice” (John 10:3-4). The pastor should emulate the Shepherd Jesus Christ.

III. Consider the Local Church as a Responsible Flock.

The goal of the shepherd is not to please the sheep (not that he overtly seeks to displease them) but to care for them and be protective of them as he obeys the Lord. How are the sheep of the fold to relate then to the shepherd or pastor?

A. The sheep are to appreciate, respect and esteem their pastor—The believers at Thessalonica were implored, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know (appreciate, honor, respect) them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem (hold in high regard) them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:12-13). The *Geneva Bible* said of this verse, “We must have consideration of those who are appointed to the ministry of the Word, the government of the church of God, and who do their duty.... That you acknowledge and take them for such as they are, that is to say, men worthy to be greatly esteemed of among you.”

B. The sheep are to obey and be submissive to the ministry of their pastor—A verse that has been alluded to before also needs to be considered from the perspective of the flock’s accountability, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit (yield to the ministry) yourselves: for they watch for your souls (they are attentive to your souls needs), 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).

C. The sheep should properly care for the earthly needs of their pastor—Paul wrote, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Paul put it another way, “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things” (1 Cor. 9:11)? The local church is to care physically for the one who is seeking to spiritually care for the flock.

D. The sheep should be cautious how they receive accusations against or seek to correct their pastor—Paul wrote a preventive, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three

witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:19-20). No pastor is perfect, but they have been set apart by God Himself! Be careful how you treat the Lord’s anointed as he is responsible to be careful how he treats the Lord’s blood bought children!

E. The sheep should be mindful of their pastor and imitate his faith—The admonition is given, “Remember (be mindful of or keep in mind) them which have the rule (leadership) over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow (imitate), considering the end of their conversation (or way of life)” (Heb. 13:7). Not only should the shepherd be remembered but saluted as well—“Salute (embrace with friendship) all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints” (Heb. 13:24). Paul’s expression to the local church at Corinth was, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

CONCLUSION:

What is the primary purpose of the local church, the shepherd and the sheep? What is the chief end for all things? The answer is always the same. What is that answer? The chief end of man, ministers and church members, is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). This was written to a local church, the one at Corinth.

We have been adopted into the family of God and made royal priests that we “should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you (us) out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). God requires of His people that they “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron. 16:29). Since you have been redeemed at a great price, “therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). This is saying you should glorify God with your entire being and relationships.

How do we glorify God? We glorify God when we reverence Him in thought, word and deed. We glorify God when we worship Him as He requires. We glorify God when we love Him by obedience to His will. We glorify God when we submit ourselves to the ministry of His Word.

Take a step from this world into the next and what is your chief end? “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.... For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 7:15, 17).

The Lord Christ declared: “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one*” (John 10:27-30).