

The Undershepherds



The Sheepfold (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as we draw near to the close of another week. Today I'm going to continue and complete the theme that we've been studying this week, "The Sheepfold." I do trust that my talks on this theme have been helpful to you.

In my talk yesterday, I described the main distinguishing marks of the sheep, what marks out real Christians. Obviously that's a very important question. Listen carefully now as I give you three simple marks, all based on this parable of the sheepfold.

First of all, the true sheep have entered by the door. That is, Jesus crucified for their sins. They have not tried to get in on the basis of church membership or their own righteousness or their good deeds or their knowledge of Scripture, but they have come as sinners, redeemed by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Second, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice." So that's the second mark, they hear the voice of Jesus. They have that direct, personal relationship with Him through which He can speak directly, they can hear His voice.

And the third mark goes with it. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me." It's not sufficient to hear, we must also obey. But when we hear and obey, that marks us out as the sheep of Jesus. It's not a denominational label, it's not a doctrinal persuasion, it's a relationship and a way of life.

Let me just give those three marks again, they're so important. The true sheep have entered by the door, Jesus Crucified; they hear His voice; and they follow Him. Summed up in these two phrases: A direct, personal relationship with Jesus and obedience to Him.

In my talk today I'm going to share about another important element in God's provision for His people: the undershepherds. Jesus is the shepherd, the good shepherd, the chief shepherd; but in the church He has set undershepherds who are called, usually, in current English, pastors, but they may be called other titles, too.

First of all I want to establish a very important general principle. God governs the world through delegated authority. Every time God wants something done, He does not step

down from His throne and speak to the individual and say, "Now do this," because God has set in the world authority that represents Him. And He governs the world through that authority. The supreme authority is Jesus. Jesus said after His death and resurrection, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given unto Me." And Jesus likewise, just like the Father, governs through delegated authority. He can do things directly and in person, normally He does them through delegated authority. And that's how He governs His church on earth, through delegated authority, through humans whom He has put in positions of authority to carry out His will.

In the church Christ has provided five main kinds of leadership. They are stated in Ephesians 4:11:

> "...He [that is the ascended Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers..." (NAS)

Those are the five main types of leadership: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Now that word translated "pastor," in that context, is the same word that's everywhere else in the New Testament is translated "shepherd." Bear that in mind: shepherds are pastors; pastors are shepherds. Pastor is an Old English word which has somewhat had its meaning reduced to a purely religious setting. But in older English it was the word for a shepherd. Those of you who are keen musicians will remember that Beethoven wrote "Pastoral Symphony," which was a symphony about shepherd life. So when you hear the word "pastor" you need to equate it with the word "shepherd."

Now, in normal circumstances, and there are exceptions to this, but in normal circumstances, Christ expects His sheep to find their place in a congregation under leaders of this kind. Under human shepherds, or undershepherds. Peter gives us a further description of these undershepherds in his first epistle, chapter 5:1-3, which is where he says:

> "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you [and elders are also shepherds, as we will see. It's just two different names for the same office.]... I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow-elder [Peter was an apostle but when he was in the local church he was just a fellow elder along with the other elders] and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, [Now listen to what he says to these elders:] Shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." (NAS)

Notice certain points there. First of all, the elders in the church are also the shepherds or pastors of the church and they had this very important responsibility of taking care of the people in the church. You remember that in Psalm 23 in the Amplified Version, the task of a shepherd described as "to feed, to guide and to protect." Well, under Jesus Christ, the chief shepherd, the shepherds or pastors in the local congregation have those three responsibilities: to feed, to guide and to protect the people of God. Peter speaks about two aspects of being a shepherd. He speaks about the motive and he says it's not "for sordid gain," not a way to get a good living. But it's "eagerly," in commitment to Jesus and to His people. When Jesus wanted Peter to commit himself to care for His sheep, He said to him, "Do you love Me, Peter?" not, "Do you love the sheep?" It's love of Christ that makes a man a good shepherd of the sheep.

And then Peter speaks about attitudes and he says, not "lording it over" the flock but being examples. We need to bear in mind that the Oriental shepherd, the biblical shepherd, did not drive his flock, he always led it. He spoke and they followed when they heard his voice. And human undershepherds must have the same attitude. They're not to drive, but they're to lead.

I want to turn to just two other passages, both of them in Hebrews 13 that also have something to tell us about these human undershepherds in the church. Hebrews 13:7:

> "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith." (NAS)

Notice the two marks of the shepherds that are endorsed and approved by the Scripture. First of all, they speak God's Word to His people; secondly, they set an example of faith, not an example of unbelief.

And the next verse in Hebrews, verse 8 of that chapter, says this:

> "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." (NAS)

If we put that together with the previous verse, "imitate their faith," it indicates that the faith of the true shepherd points the sheep to the eternal, unchanging Christ. It's very important to understand that there are men in the church today who are not to be followed because they do not fulfill

these requirements. The sheep have got to know the true shepherds from the false.

Then in Hebrews 13:17, it says again:

> "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." (NAS)

Notice there another mark of the true shepherd is they keep watch over your souls. Let's put those two passages in Hebrews together and we have these marks of the true shepherds: They speak God's Word to His people, they set an example of faith that points people to the eternal, unchanging Christ; and they keep watch over the souls of God's people.

Now let's ask for a moment, what is required of the sheep in relationship to the shepherd? And there are three words in those verses from Hebrews 13: Remember, Obey, Submit.

First, Remember. Be mindful of them. I suggest that there are two particular ways in which the sheep should remember the true shepherds. The first is in prayer for them, and the second is in financial support for them. Those are two practical ways that sheep should remember their shepherds.

And then it says Obey.

And it says Submit. And bear in mind that obedience is an outward act; submission is an inner attitude. It's not enough to obey, unless obedience springs from an inner attitude of submission. Also, in certain circumstances, it is possible to have the inner attitude of submission, but to say on ground of conscience, "I regret that in this particular point, I cannot obey you."

So those are the three requirements of the sheep in regard to the human undershepherds: to remember, to obey and to submit.

Now let me close with a very important principle, which is this: Our attitude to God's representatives is our attitude to God. In other words, where sheep are under true undershepherds of Jesus, appointed by Him, the attitude of those sheep to their undershepherd is really a picture of their attitude toward God Himself. We do not respect God more, we do not obey God more, than we respect and obey our human undershepherd. Listen to what Jesus says, and I'll close with this. When He sent forth a group of disciples to represent Him, He said this:

> "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me." (Luke 10:16, NAS)

So God sent Jesus. Our attitude to Jesus is our attitude to God. But Jesus, in turn, sent His human representatives. Because He sent them, our attitude in response to them is a picture of our attitude and response to God.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at this same time, Monday through Friday. Next week I'll be sharing with you on another rich and exciting theme from the Word of God.

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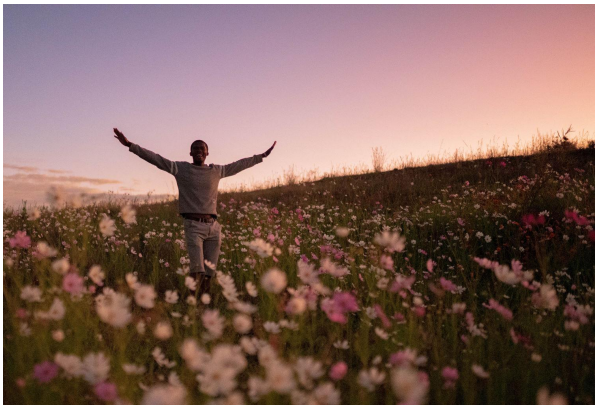

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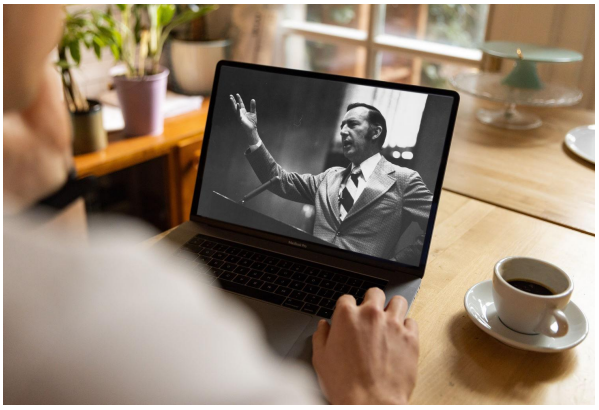

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