



Faith Pulpit

Faithful Shepherding

The picture given to us in Scripture of faithful local church leadership is that of the shepherd tending his flock. While other terms are used of him—he is an elder which speaks of his maturity and he is a bishop which views his responsibility of oversight of the Lord’s work—the term pastor describes well the heart of his ministry, that of shepherding the flock. Aspiring to hold this office is good, we are told in the Bible (1 Timothy 3:1), and there are many individuals today who occupy this office. What should be some qualities, however, which would let us know whether those pastoring are faithful to the Lord’s calling or not?

First, the faithful shepherd is one who loves his flock. In that grand passage in John chapter ten where our Lord speaks of Himself as the good Shepherd He contrasts being a good shepherd with being merely a person hired to do a job. What is the distinction He makes? Is it in the professional schools each has attended? No. Is it in the abilities which each has? No. The distinction between the good shepherd and the person hired to do a job is seen in their attitude toward the sheep. Our Lord says:

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a 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 a hireling, and careth not for the sheep (John 10:11–13).”

It is not the pastor’s determination to do a good job nor his diligence alone which make him a faithful shepherd. He must love his flock. He must love them more than wanting to succeed, more than desiring to be popular and accepted. He must be willing to lay down his life for his sheep. I can still remember many pastors gathering for a Bible conference during my freshman year in college and hearing them speak to one another disparagingly about their flocks. What a shock that was to me! On occasion young people will say to me that they grew up in a parsonage but only remember their parents

commenting on problems and problem people in their flocks, hardly ever mentioning their love and commitment to their flocks or the joys of the ministry. This certainly is not to characterize the life and ministry of a faithful shepherd.

Second, the faithful shepherd is one who diligently tends, provides for, guides, and guards his sheep. In Acts chapter twenty the Apostle Paul reminds the pastoral leadership in Ephesus (vs. 17–38) of the kind of ministry he had when he had been ministering in their midst, and he exhorts them to exhibit those same qualities as they serve the Lord. He mentions personal character qualities such as humility (v. 19), persistence (v. 19b), dedication (v. 24), and a giving spirit (vs. 33–36). He also mentions the importance of faithful shepherding which includes the following:

1. Being in the homes of his people, ministering to their needs (v. 20). The shepherd will get to know his people by spending time with them, praying with them (v. 36), and weeping with them (vs. 19, 31, 37, 38). They will sense his commitment to them, and they will see his godly personal example. Often a pastor's personal ministry will be long remembered after he has left. Being there during times of family crisis, when loved ones depart this life, as well as during the times of rejoicing will never be forgotten.
2. Teaching and preaching all of the counsel of God (vs. 25–27). Faithful shepherding demands a clear presentation of all of God's truth. Hence the need for regular Bible exposition which relates its teaching to where we live. This requires an understanding of the text and its implications (sound doctrine both believed and obeyed) and a presentation which allows one's hearers to understand and grow. This requires the faithful shepherd to preach from many different parts of Scripture and to proclaim what God has said, whether it is popular or not.
3. Warning God's people of error and false teachers (vs. 29–31). One sometimes hears the attitude expressed that we should be only positive and never negative in expounding God's Word and in leading His people. That attitude, however, is very different from the one expressed by Paul in this passage. There were enemies of the truth about whom God's people must be warned. To only build up the flock in a devotional manner and never to warn them of those who do not teach the truth is failure on the part of the shepherd. It fattens the flock, making it attractive to the wolves, but does not enable the flock to beware of or withstand the enemy's advances.

The Apostle here urges the Ephesian pastors to “take heed” and “feed the church of God” (v. 28) because “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (v. 29). These are false teachers who come in from without. They do not care for the flock and only wish to harm it with their wrong doctrine. Paul refers to them as “wolves” whose savage work produces grief to God and to those who really love His people. The Apostle continues by saying that false teachers will also arise from within the local assembly (v. 30). How should the faithful shepherd respond? Paul says “I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (v. 31). To be silent when warning is needed is sin! The faithful shepherd cannot refrain from warning the flock of God. He is clear in what he says, he warns on a regular basis, and he does it out of a heart of love for the spiritual well-being of his people. Yet today many Christian leaders act as if there were no enemy or false teaching around. One has but to turn on the radio or television, pick up readily-available religious magazines and tracts, or open one's front door to the couple from a religious group today to discover that false teaching is all around us.

Third, the faithful shepherd is one who remembers that he is accountable to our Lord for his shepherding ministry. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that pastors “watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief” (Hebrews 13:17b). Peter urges pastors to be faithful in their shepherding responsibilities (1 Peter 5:1-3) and then reminds them that “when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (v. 4). It is Christ, after all; Who is “THE Shepherd and Bishop” of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). He is “the good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14), He is “that great Shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20), and He is “the chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4) to Whom ultimately all of us are responsible and to Whom every earthly pastor must give account.

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