

# GOSPEL GLEANER

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## Did the Preacher Fail the People?

Thomas Southerland

For certain young men, the excitement of becoming a fulltime preacher fuels their ambitions. They study hard in preaching schools through the week while preaching at small congregations on the weekends and occasionally holding a gospel meeting. The young preacher has prospects of bringing masses of lost souls to Christ. What a humbling experience it is to be used by God in the spread of His kingdom! Could it be that the preacher's pride is inflated when someone responds to the gospel message? It is possible. Even though the young preacher realizes the power of God is not the messenger, but it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves; maybe the numerous compliments on his preaching he receives each Sunday start to creep toward his ego making him think that he is really, really good at preaching.

He is devoted to study, active in evangelism, accurate in his presentation of the gospel, and just as flawed as any other man. Yet, as the years go by, his preaching seems to be tolerated more than appreciated. The eyelids of those who desperately need to obey the gospel become increasingly heavy. The drowsiness of the lost will be their undoing. Caught up in all types of sin, the entanglements of this world, and the grave consequences sin brings; the erring waste away in their iniquities. The preacher patiently preaches on, knowing that "the Lord is longsuffering toward us, and not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

Many years later, the now much older preacher is emphatic, he is no longer subtle. He makes his points as bluntly as he can, still preaching with spirit, truth, and fervor. He offends many because of his tone. His popularity among the lukewarm spirals downward. There might have been a day when he cared about being liked by everyone, but that day has passed. He has watched those whom he loved fall into the traps of lasciviousness and self-indulgence. He has seen their demise. He knows now more than ever that he is powerless to save them; but the gospel of Jesus can. The preacher is relentless. As hard as he may try to wake his fellow man, still many a sinner drifts off to sleep. The gospel has fallen on deaf ears. He that has ears to hear, let him hear!

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# The Need for True Shepherds in Israel: A Study of Ezekiel 34:1-31

Andy Erwin

“Should not the shepherds feed the flock?” (Ezekiel 34:2) We can and should ask the same question about elders in the Lord’s church today (cf. Acts 20:28). When the shepherds of the flock become careless with their responsibility of feeding the flock, apathy, division, and apostasy will result.

In the Old Testament, the verb of “shepherd” (*raah*) is translated to pasture, tend, feed, lead, and keep the flock.<sup>1</sup> The verb can also represent the entire job of a shepherd. A “shepherd” is simply a feeder or tender of sheep.<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament, the verbs *bosko* and *poimaino* are translated to feed, herd, and to tend as a shepherd.<sup>3</sup> Again, the entirety of the work can be represented in this word. Accordingly, in the New Testament, a “shepherd” (*poimen*) is also one who herds or tends sheep.<sup>4</sup>

## God as Shepherd (vv.1–22)

Using the shepherd as a metaphor, the shepherd-leader concept in the Old Testament begins with God. He is depicted as a Shepherd to Israel (Gen. 48:15; Gen. 49:24). Throughout the Old Testament, God is shown leading His flock (Ps. 31:3). He leads out of love (Exod. 15:13),<sup>5</sup> and goes before them (Ps. 68:7), driving out the enemy to make room for His own flock (Ps. 78:52–55). The Shepherd Psalm (Ps. 23) depicts God as a personal Shepherd

(v.1) who leads His sheep to pastures and waters (v.2), while protecting them with His rod and staff (v.4), even restoring them to health (v.3). He also gathers His sheep (Isa. 56:8) and carries them in His bosom to safety (Isa. 40:11; cf. Ps. 28:9). As Shepherd, God is presented guiding (Deut. 26:5–8; Ps. 77:20; 80:1), protecting (Ps. 78:52), saving (Ezek. 34:22), leading (Jer. 50:19; Mic. 2:12, 13), and keeping careful watch over His flock (Jer. 31:10; Ps. 121:4).

During Israel’s Old Testament history, God did not merely serve as a Shepherd who led by example. To the contrary, He actively directed His flock in paths of righteousness (Ps. 23:3). God served as leader, protector, and ruler for Israel. God led according to His righteousness, holiness, justice, and love. God’s reputation among the nations depended upon the standards of the people who bore His name. He sought to remove wicked influences from the flock He pastured (Zech.10:3; 11:7).

God began the practice of utilizing “under shepherds” to look after the needs of His vulnerable flock (cf. 2 Sam. 23:3–4). Moses and Aaron are depicted as shepherds over the flock (Ps. 77:20; Isa. 63:11). God did not want Israel to be as sheep without a shepherd upon their deaths, and thus He appointed Joshua to shepherd leadership

(Num. 27:16–21). The Judges followed in this capacity (2 Sam. 7:7). David then served God and His flock as a shepherd king (2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Chron. 11:2; Ps. 78:70–72).

God’s desire was to give His flock shepherds after His own heart to feed them with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15). Yet, contrasted against the faithful “under shepherds” provided by God were unfaithful leaders (shepherds) who transgressed the law of God (Jer. 2:8), and influenced the people to do likewise (Jer. 10:21; 12:10; 22:22; 23:1–2; 25:34–38; 50:6–7). The most infamous recounting of their wicked rule over God’s flock is found here in Ezekiel 34:1–10.

Israel of old and the Israel of God today (the church, Gal. 6:16), benefit by having true spiritual shepherds and faithful watchmen to warn them. It takes both faithful shepherds and faithful preachers to keep a congregation on the right path. The shepherds of Israel were not concerned with strengthening the weak, ministering to the sick and broken, bringing back those who had been driven away, or seeking the lost (vv.3-6). Instead of functioning as godly and faithful keepers of the flock, they drove away the flock by ruling them with force and cruelty. The result of the failed leadership of Israel was a people “scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all

<sup>1</sup> William L. Holliday, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 342. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, and Wilhelm Gensenius, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gensenius Hebrew and*

*English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1978), 944.

<sup>2</sup> William Wilson, *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 388.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early*

*Christian Literature*, edited by Fredrick William Danker, third edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 842.

<sup>4</sup> Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 843.

<sup>5</sup> On one occasion God is viewed as shepherding with anger (Ps. 74:1).

the beasts of the field when they were scattered” (v.5).

The Lord said, “My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them” (34:6). By this statement we are reminded that the flock belongs to God. In fact, throughout this discourse, God continually refers to Israel as His sheep and His flock. We must understand this is equally true of the church today (cf. John 10:14, 27; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

It was not because there was a shortage of “food” that the flock was not being fed. The shepherds of the flock were fat and clothed (v.3) and were feeding themselves (v.10). The rulers were not true spiritual leaders of the flock. As a result, the flock was scattered as sheep without a shepherd (v. 5; cf. Zech. 10:2). The rulers behaved like owners rather than hired servants. They became hirelings and thieves.

The shepherds of His people were negligent, irresponsible, and careless with the sacred work they had in overseeing God’s flock. God unequivocally states: “I am against the shepherds” (v.10). Due to the negligence of the false shepherds of Israel, God would take the matter into His hands to seek and save the lost (v.11), to feed, water, and rest His flock (v.13 ff.), to bind the injured and strengthen the weak, and to destroy the wicked shepherds (v.16; cf. Zech. 11:7).<sup>6</sup>

### **Christ as Shepherd and His Covenant (vv. 23–31)**

The Old Testament prophets look ahead to a time when God would rescue His flock from the nations to which they were scattered, returning them to their homeland from captivity (Isa. 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 5:3; Zech. 10:3 ff.). Israel was in need of spiritual transformation and God would pour upon them the “Spirit of grace and supplication” (Zech. 12:10) corresponding to a fountain being opened for sin and impurity (Zech. 13:1).<sup>7</sup> Israel was in need of greater understanding and assurance of God’s capacity for forgiveness, to which the prophets speak with unanimity (Isa. 55:6–9; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25; 37:23).

The Lord promised to establish one Shepherd over Israel (Mic. 5:4; Zech. 11:16).<sup>8</sup> The Shepherd would be from the line of David (Isa. 11:1 ff.; Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 34:23; Ezek. 37:24; Zech. 12:1–13:1). While being the Lord’s Servant (Ezek. 34:23), the Shepherd would also be “prince among them” (Ezek. 34:24). Israel would be one nation again, with one king (Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 37:22–24). The “Ruler” would be born in Bethlehem, although He has existed from eternity (Mic. 5:2).

The Spirit of the Lord would be upon Him and He would Shepherd with wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and the fear of the Lord, while judging in righteousness (Isa. 11:1–5; cf. Ezek. 34:17). The

Shepherd Servant would establish a new covenant between God and Israel, ensuring the ultimate forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 34:25; Ezek. 37:26), and establishing peace between God and man (Mic. 5:5; Isa. 9:6 ff.). The Shepherd would eventually become King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9), after first being stricken by the people (Zech. 13:7), and for the people (Isa. 53:4 ff.).

The writers of the New Testament make clear that the Shepherd to whom the prophets pointed was Jesus Christ. Not only does Jesus check all the boxes pertaining to the fulfillment of these prophecies, He also exhibits the most admirable traits of a shepherd leader in the image of the Father (see Heb. 1:3).

Jesus was a constant companion to the flock, especially the twelve disciples.<sup>9</sup> He sought to find the lost sheep that had been scattered (Matt. 10:6; Matt. 15:24; Luke 19:10; cf. Jer. 23:4, 5; Ezek. 34:5; Zech. 10:2 ff.). He was a shepherd to sheep who had none (Matt. 2:6; Mark 6:34). He shepherded out of compassion (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34; cf. Exod. 15:13). He was a friend to His flock (John 15:13–15), which consisted also of publicans and sinners (Matt. 11:19).

Christ’s goal as Shepherd is to lead the flock to springs of the water of life where God will wipe every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:7). To accomplish His purpose, Christ realized He would have to be stricken (cf. Zech. 13:7; Isa.

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<sup>6</sup> In his classic work, E.W. Hengstenberg believed the two staffs of Zech. 11:7, called “Favor” and “Union” by the Lord, signify the two-fold danger of outward enemies and internal strife which was facing the flock. The staff of “Favor” represents the mercy of the Lord in securing the people from outward enemies, while the staff of “Union” denotes brotherly concord among the people. Thus, God’s work as a faithful

shepherd would involve settling strife among the flock as well. For further reading see E.W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1970), 354.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr., and Gary E. Yates, *The Message of the Twelve* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 292.

<sup>8</sup> It is also foretold that God would raise “shepherds” (Jer. 23:4). Hengstenberg here

argued against too much stress being given to the plural, believing every plural can be employed to designate a generic idea in Jeremiah. The generic idea was to be described in the individual of v.5. See Hengstenberg, *Christology in the Old Testament*, 658.

<sup>9</sup> So much was Jesus the constant companion to His flock that Matthew gives special notice of when He was not among them (cf. Matt. 14:13, 23).

53:5, 8), and lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:17), that they might live (John 10:27–28).

Jesus Christ is the “good” Shepherd (John 10:11) and the great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20). Of the passages in the New Testament provided to confirm the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies, it would be difficult to find one which does more to fix an application of the “shepherd” prophecies and metaphor of the Old Testament than does the tenth chapter of John’s Gospel (vv.1-38). The text presents the familiar concept of false shepherds similar to those condemned in the prophets. During the ministry of Christ, the Jewish religious leaders had come to resemble the wicked shepherds of the time of the prophets.

The Good Shepherd who is Christ, in comparison with the Shepherd Father of the Old Testament, is the rightful leader of the scattered flock (cf. Matt. 2:6; 9:36; 10:6; 15:24; Mark 6:34). Jesus has the familiar voice the sheep recognize and follow (John 10:3-5, 16, 27). He leads them out and goes before them just as the Father has done for Israel (Ps.23:3; Ps. 31:3; Ps. 68:7).

Jesus is contrasted against the wicked shepherds considered to be thieves and robbers (John 10:8). As the thief who comes to kill, to steal, and to destroy (John 10:10), Jesus has come to save, to rescue, and to give life (John 10:7, 9, 10).

Unlike the false shepherds, who abandon the flock and flee at the sight of danger (John10:12–13; cf. Ezek. 34:1–10), Jesus is willing to die (to lay down His life) to protect and save His

flock (John 10:11–15; cf. Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31–32; Mark 14:27–28).

Jesus is the Servant Shepherd through whom God would lead His people and do His will (John 10:14–15, 18, 38; cf. Ezek. 34:11 ff.). He is the Shepherd which will gather all the sheep into one sheepfold (John 10:16; cf. Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 37:22–24). His protection is sure and strong. No one can snatch the sheep from the hand of the Good Shepherd (John10:28).

Christ is depicted as a Shepherd to His flock, leading His flock, going before them, and protecting them. The relationship Jesus has with His disciples is central to His leadership effectiveness as the Good Shepherd. The imagery emphasizes the care and compassion of the Shepherd and the dependence of the flock upon Him. The sheep know Him (cf. Amos 3:1–2), recognize and hear His voice, and faithfully follow Him.

#### **Application for Today: Elders Serving as Under-Shepherds to Christ**

Pursuant to the shepherd imagery of Christ over the flock is the imagery of under-shepherds to follow His example in caring for the church. Just as the Father did not want Israel to be left as sheep without a shepherd after the death of Moses (Num. 27:17), Christ did not want the church to be left without pastoral care after His ascension to His throne in heaven (Acts 20:28-29; cf. Jer. 23:4). Just as Jesus received the work of shepherding from His Father, He handed over the task to the apostles. The apostles then passed along the

function of shepherd leader to elders in the churches.

To ensure faithful nurturing, guidance, and protection for the flock, the Lord gave qualifications and stipulations for shepherd leaders in every congregation (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).<sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was a constant companion to the twelve, elders are to remain among the flock (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Pet. 5:2), caring for, encouraging, and guiding the church. A shepherd leader directs the flock and helps the flock to navigate a faithful course in the world, determining direction for the flock, while following the lead of the Good Shepherd.

As shepherd leaders follow the example of Christ, the church follows them (1 Cor. 11:1; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). But, just as Christ did not lead by example *only* (cf. John 14:15; John 15:10), elders are not to lead *only* by example. The flock is commanded to obey and submit to those who are watching over their souls (Heb. 13:17). The elders have been entrusted with “charge” over the flock (1 Thess. 5:12). If the shepherd leaders are faithful in communicating the word of God, the flock must obediently follow them as they follow Christ (cf. Phil. 4:9).

The shepherd leader is a servant leader who oversees the flock as a voluntary service to the flock (1 Pet. 5:2), hoping to protect the sheep from harm. His interest is not in lording over the flock (1 Pet. 5:3), like the wicked shepherds from the prophets or from the ministry of Christ. He *serves* because it is his desire to serve and to teach those whom he leads to be servants as well.

<sup>10</sup> The New Testament depicts *elders* (pl.) serving as shepherd leaders within each congregation. See Acts 11:30; 14:23;

15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17, 28–29; 21:18; Titus 1:5; Heb. 13:7, 17. Elders were also called bishops, presbyters, pastors,

shepherds, and overseers depending upon the passage and the given translation of the Bible..

By serving the flock, the shepherd is imitating the shepherd leadership of Christ (cf. Mark 10:43-45).

Shepherd leaders are active participants in the ministry, serving as models of proper behavior and desires. Such leaders are desirous to see their flock involved in the ministry and mission of Christ and to use their talents and abilities to fulfill their respective ministries and thereby bring glory to God.

The desire to see the spiritual maturity and health of the flock prompts the development of relationship, discipleship, and biblical education. Through ongoing discipleship and a constant state of spiritual mindedness, the sheep are transformed and develop the mind of Christ. Shepherds must lead the flock in an environment conducive to encouragement and edification, both individually and collectively. In such an environment, spiritual growth will be achieved and numerical growth will occur (Eph. 4:11). The flock will be safe and multiply.

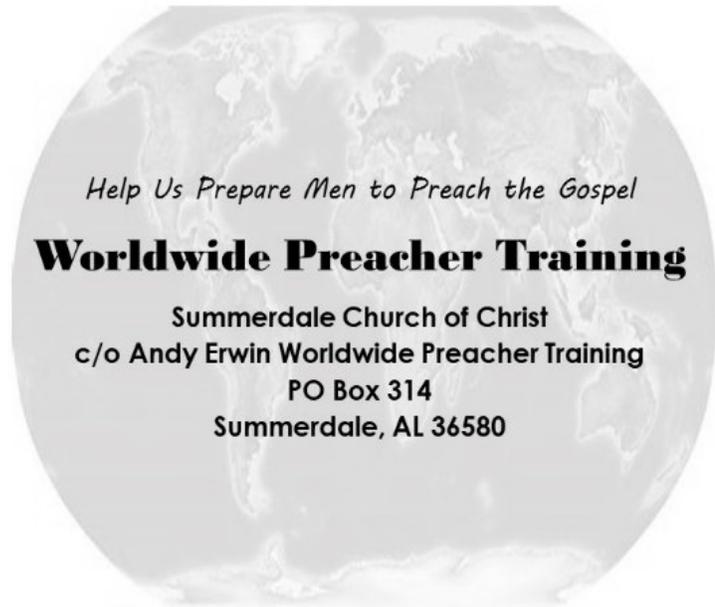
From Father to Son, Son to apostles, apostles to elders, elders must also encourage shepherd leadership among the flock. There is a point to which every Christian is called to provide pastoral care to one another, which is borne out in the numerous “one another” passages of the New Testament.<sup>11</sup>

The mutual edification of the body of Christ consists of love, encouragement, forgiveness, fellowship, teaching, and care. Each of these actions should be considered aspects of healthy shepherd leadership. Various relationships within the flock will also require

direction and guidance to come from one another (see Titus 2:1-8).

Each Christian should desire to be a shepherd leader when the situation calls for it, looking unto the example of the elders of the congregation, and ultimately Christ as the “Chief Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.”

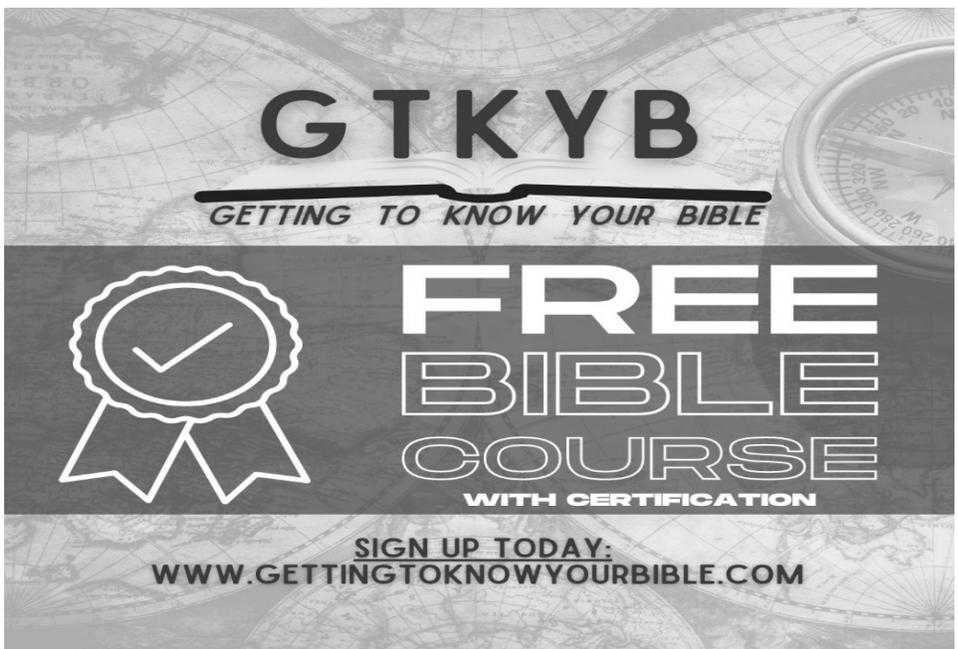
*Andy Erwin is the Editor of the Gospel Gleaner. He lives in Fayetteville, TN.*



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<sup>11</sup> “One Another” passages in the New Testament include: John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 12:16; 13:8; 14:19; 15:14;

16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; Gal. 5:5; 5:14; 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5).  
5:13; 6:2; Eph. 4:2; 4:25; 4:32; 5:21 Col. 3:9; 3:13; 3:16; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 4:18; James 4:11; 5:9; 5:16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8, 9;

# Watch Who You Owe: A Modern Application of Proverbs 22:7

Andy Robison

In young adulthood, I went on one skiing trip, learning several lessons. While learning I was neither athletically nor financially inclined toward the sport, the peculiar circumstances of that trip taught me also a lesson with biblical ramifications.

A somewhat older, kind and generous man paid my way that day. He then aimed to teach me the basics. Taking me to the slight incline of the short bunny slope, I could learn to get going, stop, and get up when fallen. I learned out of necessity how to get up; there were a lot of falls.

Quite early in the day, the gentleman who paid urged, "Come on, we're going to the next slope." I objected that I was not ready for it yet and did not want to go. That's when he interjected his two-word statement that trumped my argument. He asked, "Who paid?" His point was that since he paid, he got to call that shots about how hard I could be pushed to learn the sport.

With good-hearted, friendly banter between us, I relented and went to the next level. That was all in good fun. For all my cynicism about skiing written above, that whole day is a great memory and that man is still a dear friend.

The lesson of that instance did not hit me that day; it was many years later. After I learned a little bit about finances, the Bible, and even politics, I thought a lot about how poignant that incident was.

Proverbs 22:7 is the relevant verse: "The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender." Ah, there it is. Since he paid, he was in control. Now apply that lesson to other areas of life.

Loans are quite often necessary in our culture—for cars, houses, and the like. I've signed the documents committing to five years or thirty years of payments. Anyone who has done so can sympathize with how nerve-racking that is. One is committing himself to that many years of financial subjection. After that, the bank calls the shots. There always seems to be that fearful clause that they can demand payment in full at any time during the repayment. No one likes that clause, but if you don't sign it, you don't get the loan, then you don't get the house, and the dominoes keep falling. "The rich rules over the poor." That is why some self-proclaimed gurus preach financial freedom and stewardship by urging people to pay off debt as quickly as possible and remain debt-free. I'm not qualified to discuss all the ins and outs of that, but the truth of the Bible is apparent: "The borrower is servant to the lender."

What concerns me is not whether people have reasonable debt, but that some on the other end of the spectrum seem to know how to abuse this principle to gain control over people. Slavery is the obvious and tragic illustration of this. Another might be some of the old days' companies (like logging or coal) who paid barely livable wages, had everyone living in company housing, and sold them their groceries and goods at the company store. I'll never know all the hearts of all the corporate executives, but there may be something to the idea that they thought they could thus keep people in line. "The rich rules over the poor."

Treading on dangerous ground, I suggest that politically there may be some cadres of parties who scheme to manipulate people by giving handouts. There are accusations out there that the



reason there is help available for more and more people is that some of those politicians know that if you get more and more on the government dole, then those people will be much more motivated to vote for those politicians who provided it. Those people will be less independent and less motivated to make their own way. They will become dependent on the "lender" or the "rich," who in this case becomes an overreaching government. I suppose it is possible that some leaders cynically approach their policies this way under the supposed guise of helping people and seeming compassionate. "The borrower is servant to the lender," might be expanded in interpretation and application: "The taker is servant to the giver."

Whether or not CEOs or politicians have such manipulative motives remains for the God of heaven to judge (Jer. 17:10). Furthermore, sometimes a Christian cannot help but have a loan or partake in a government program. Nevertheless, the lesson for the individual Christian steward might be this: be careful and be cautious about what you're willing to take. Motives of the lender notwithstanding, the borrower can quickly—even unwittingly—enslave himself.

Further extension might be made to the spiritual realm. Be careful what fulfillment of lust you take from the devil. You can end up a slave to the one who provided it (Rom. 6:16; John 8:34).

*Andy Robison is the Director of the West Virginia School of Preaching, Moundsville, WV*



The junior year of high school football in my hometown was terribly bad. During that season, we lost all our games. In one contest, we lost 63-0. After losing so many ballgames, practice and other things associated with playing football lost all its joy.

Looking back on this time, one memory in particular stands out among the rest. The high school was having a pep rally in anticipation of the last game of that year. The team we played was our big rival, and they had a stellar year of football during that season. As a matter of fact, they went to the state playoffs and had some team members who went on to play ball in college and one who played professionally.

The pep rally is, by definition, intended to encourage the team and let them know that the school was behind them in their athletic endeavors. That pep rally was unlike any that I had ever been party to. Usually, there is a degree of excitement even when another team is heavily favored in a contest. The team along with those in the rally typically cheer, chant, and scream at the top of their lungs to generate excitement. That was not so at this pep rally. On this occasion, the football team was completely silent. I knew that we had lost the game before the opening kickoff, because no one had any energy, zeal, or determination for a winning game. It was a scoreless game on our part and

our cross-county rivals won the contest with very little effort.

Similarly, Christians can sometimes lose heart when they are facing trying circumstances. These trials can come from a multitude of sources. They might include problems within one's family, problems from friends, or other individuals. It could be that someone is struggling internally to remain faithful when they are being severely challenged. Satan uses so many things to discourage God's people.

Considering all that one faces in life, God's people need edification. Paul encourages the brethren at Corinth to avoid losing heart. He says, in 2 Corinthians 4:1, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." It is easy for one to lose heart when they are being criticized and persecuted for what they believe. To that end, every person and every congregation of the Lord's people need edification.

Consequently, this was one of the problems found in the church at Sardis. Jesus said in Revelation 3:1, "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."'"

The reality of their situation was unlike their outward appearance. The church had a reputation for working, but they were truly dead. Institutions can continue to function long after the life has gone from them. They function as a husk of what they formerly were. The same can be said of certain churches. One can be engaged in "busy work" without accomplishing anything that is meaningful in the grand scheme of things. This seems to be the situation with the church at Sardis and with congregations of the Lord's body today. Sometimes it seems that churches are going through the motions just to say they have done something. Without planning, purpose, and action, activities are devoid of meaning and the ability to advance the cause of Christianity.

Just as inactivity is virulent in nature so is zeal. When the church is zealous for the Lord, and accomplishing the work of the church, it can do great things. Notice Paul's description of the influence that zeal has upon the brethren. 2 Corinthians 9:2 says, "For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority." They had "stirred up the majority" by their zeal for good works. This is the basic idea that one finds in scripture.

Sometimes we must be prodded or provoked to do the right thing. Hebrews 10:23-24 says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works."

All people need encouragement at times and the context of Hebrews chapter ten lets the reader know that this happens when we are congregated with likeminded people. This is one of the reasons why assembling with other

Christians is so important—so we can remain encouraged. Therefore, the meeting of God’s people should never be taken for granted.

Consequently, we are encouraged to avoid weariness in well doing. Paul says, in Galatians 6:9-10, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” The mere fact that Paul mentions the potential for weariness in well doing implies that it is possible for one to become lax in accomplishing God’s work in his life. That is, people sometimes lose heart in serving Him.

Hopefully, you have not lost heart. Be comforted in knowing that it sometimes happens, and God’s word provides encouragement. Through engagement in ministry and remembrance of God’s mercy, we can be edified to the extent that we might finish the race set before us.

*Johnny Trail preaches for the Hillcrest church of Christ, Springfield, TN*



## Our Earthly Battle

Bill Rayburn

Revelation chapter 12 provides us with a synopsis of the situation of mankind from the beginning of time until the day the Lord returns. We find here both the history and the future of mankind’s existence on earth. We find from the beginning that Satan was there deceiving and destroying. In this chapter, the antagonists are introduced and the conflict that stretches across time ensues.

While we may have differences of opinion as to the specific identity of the woman introduced in verse 1, there can be no differences in understanding that the man child she bears is the Son of God. The origin of this image is found in Genesis 3:15, when the Lord told Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Satan had his temporary victories, but God has won the spiritual war.

In verse 4, we find the purpose of Satan. As he stands before the woman, he prepares himself to destroy her child. Since this is his character, we are not surprised with this image. The Lord tells us he has been a “murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). It is what he wants to do.

When we look back over history, we see this played out in a consistent manner. Satan sought to destroy the crowning glory of God’s creation, the one made in His own image. While he had a measure of success by enticing Eve, then Adam to sin, Satan did not have the ultimate victory.

He then tried to destroy mankind again, but in Genesis chapters 6-8, we find a man named Noah who found favor with God and mankind was saved from destruction.

In succeeding generations, Satan gave it his best try to destroy man, but he failed. He tried to destroy Israel, through whom God had chosen to bring forth the Messiah, but he failed. He tried to destroy the Messiah when He arrived on earth as a baby, but he failed. Satan tried to tempt Jesus to sin, but he failed. He tried to destroy Jesus by having Him put to death, not realizing this was the reason Christ came to the earth. When Satan could not stop the Messiah from establishing His kingdom on earth, Satan tried to destroy the kingdom, but he failed. He killed many, but the kingdom grew. Now, since he has failed to destroy the kingdom of God, Satan has only one more shot.

The faithful of God “overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). Faithful Christians are “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 1:13). But, while the victory over Satan is final, he is still allowed to do his work of deception on the earth. Many will be deceived by Satan and will follow him to his destruction. The “inhabiters of the earth and of the sea” (Revelation 12:12) will believe Satan’s lies and follow him to their own destruction.

We find in this passage the assurance that Satan could not prevent Christ from fulfilling the mission for which God sent Him to earth. Since Satan could not prevent Christ, the only alternative for him is to deceive those on earth. Satan was unable to destroy mankind through his accusations before God (cf. Job chapters 1-2).

When Satan could not destroy God's people, Israel, could not subvert the Savior, could not prevent the fulfillment of God's plan for the salvation of mankind, could not destroy the church and the word of God, he turned his attention to individual Christians. Satan cannot overcome Christ directly. He must work against the people of God. This will go on constantly. The only way we can defeat Satan is to be in the safety of God's kingdom, sealed by the Holy Spirit that is promised only to "the servants of our God" (Revelation 7:3).

*Bill Rayburn is the Assistant Director of the Open Door Ministry. He lives in Birmingham, AL.*

*Continued from page 1: **Did the Preacher Fail the People?***

The years go by, and the preacher has now aged. Many of those whom he implored by the gospel to repent have now been taken in their sins. He hangs his head and watches the dreadful judgement as the fruit of lives filled with debauchery ripens and the terrible harvest is reaped. The victory over death and sin was offered by the Savior, but the message was rejected in favor of the allurements of the flesh. And now, tired beyond his years, and still unable to open the eyes of the people, to jolt them awake to the forgiveness of Christ, the preacher folds his hands in rest.

What will the slumbering sinners do? Who will be sent to awaken them? Who will proclaim, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved?" And "How will they call upon God if they do not believe in God? How will they believe in God if they have not heard the gospel? And how will they hear without a preacher? Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of

God; but have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world! But they have not all obeyed the gospel...All day long God has stretched out His hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Romans 10:14-16, 21).

Even so, the preacher of righteousness is a sweet savor unto God in those that are saved and also those who perish (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:14-17).

*Thomas Southerland preaches for the Water Street church of Christ, Charlotte, TN*

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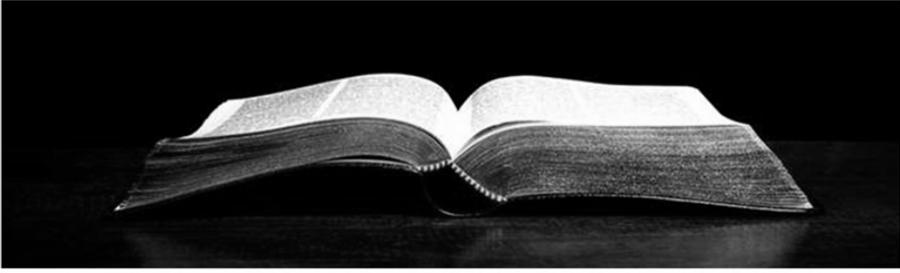
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# Change My Religion?

Tom L. McLemore

All of us have felt pressured to change our minds or our behavior on one occasion or another. It may be that we thought it was best to resist the pressure and not change, or we saw the need to change and did so. Have you ever heard anyone say, “I’ll never change my religion” or “Don’t expect me to change my religion”? Please consider that such an attitude may result in being lost, and in this study, I hope to convince you as to why that danger is real.

Are you willing to consider if you need to change your religion? How greatly do you desire confidence before God that your religion is right, true, and acceptable? Those who honestly will examine their religion may have the greatest confidence in it (2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). Confidence itself is not proof that one’s religion is right, true, and acceptable to God, but a rigorous attempt to bring one’s religion in line with divine revelation is the basis for genuine Christian confidence.

Are you willing to exhibit the same openness with regard to the rightness, truth, and acceptableness of *your religion* as you exhibit in *other areas of your life*? For instance, if you go to the doctor, are you willing to accept the idea that you may not be well, you may need surgery, or may need medicine? Or do you go in and say to the doctor, “Don’t examine me. I’m fine. If you tell me I am sick, I won’t listen”?

Would you describe yourself as infallible, omniscient, superhuman, and incapable of misunderstanding, of being deceived, or of being mistaken? In



any area of life? In *religion*? Is everything you and I think and believe true and right according to the Scriptures? Are we absolutely sure? Is there a possibility that there is something we may have misunderstood, missed, overlooked, or failed to consider?

You may need a change from a *humanly-contrived* religion to *divinely-revealed* religion (Matthew 15:9). Can you show New Testament authority for everything you believe and practice in religion? Do you need a change from a self-determined religion to a Bible-based religion? Does your religion have elements based on “this is what I like,” or is it totally based upon “thus saith the Lord?”

Do you need a change from a *denominational* to an *undenominational* religion? *Undenominational* religion is that for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20, 21). This is the way to be a *Christian* pure and simple (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), rather than a particular *kind* or variety of Christian (of which the New Testament says nothing).

You may need a change from a *secondhand* religion to a *personal* religion. You may see the need to progress from “I believe this because it is what my preacher, parents, and friends believe, etc.” to “I believe this because I

*have examined the word of God for myself, and this is what it teaches.”* Remember, your preacher, parents, and friends will not be called to give account for you on judgment day. Each of us will be required to do that for ourselves (Romans 14:12).

Do you need to change from *vain* religion to *pure* religion (James 1:26, 27). What is the difference? Pure religion is religion of which the proof is in the living. According to James, it is exemplified by bridling one’s tongue and caring for those who are in need.

If everything we believe is true and right according to the Scriptures, are we *doing* what we believe? Are we *living* completely by what we believe? If everything we are doing *is* true and right according to God’s revelation, could we possibly do it *better*? Is there *more* that I need to know, believe, and do? And will I need to believe *that* more deeply and increasingly do *that* better (Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:1)? It may be that at present we see no call for change, but we must constantly be open to the *possibility* that a change of one type or another *is* necessary.

You may need to change from a *nominal* or *casual* religion to a *genuine, consecrated* religion. If you are a member of the Lord’s church, are you dedicated to worship, Bible study, prayer,

and involvement in the life of the local congregation (Acts 2:42)? Are you devoted to assembling for worship and encouraging other Christians to be faithful (Hebrews 10:24, 25)? Are you ready, willing, and able to teach the word of righteousness to others (Hebrews 5:11-14)?

Practically speaking, you and I may need to change from our *present state* of religious maturity to a *greater* religious maturity. We can never get to the point in religion where no change is necessary (Philippians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 6:1-4).

The revelation of true religion is stationary, fixed. It is the faith revealed *once* for *all* (Jude 3). The quest is to know and live by *that* faith. It will not adjust to us; we must come in line with it. It is the standard by which we will be judged (John 12:48).

The task of human beings is to engage in a continual quest for the truth of the New Testament and to come into closer and closer relationship with it. We must come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus urges *continual* reception of His teaching (John 8:31, 32). As we receive more and more of His teaching, it will correct what is incorrect, bring to light the false, and cause the true to emerge. The Holy Scriptures are profitable for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

I hope that each of us may be willing to examine his or her religion continually, and whenever and wherever changes are warranted, may we yield reverently to the Lord and make needed changes without delay!

*Tom McLemore preaches for the Effingham church of Christ, Effingham, IL*

## "YOU SMELL LIKE SHEEP"

Raymond Elliott

The brother and his wife were about to leave our house when I said these words to my Christian friend, "You smell like sheep." You see, he and his wife have been helping to buy some of our groceries since the spring of 2020 when the pandemic began in our nation. My brother in Christ is one of our six shepherds who serve and lead our congregation. I could safely say that all of our shepherds 'smell like sheep.'

The reason I make that statement is that I have observed them visiting the sick, staying with families in the hospitals when a loved one is in surgery, or visiting the sick whether in their homes, nursing homes, or in hospitals. I know they have carried in their cars the sick to doctors locally or in another city. They also encourage weak members to be more faithful to the Lord. They will also visit those who have fallen away from Christ and His church and encourage them to repent and come back to the Lord.

To 'smell like sheep' you have to be among the sheep to lead, protect, feed, keep watch over them, and endeavor to know them. There are other terms that are in the New Testament regarding the work of those who are chosen to care for the flock which is under their oversight. They are elder (presbyter), overseer (bishop) in addition to shepherd (pastor). Here are a couple of passages of scripture in which we find these terms.

In Acts 20:17-28 we find the apostle Paul at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem. It was while he was there that he sent for the **elders** in Ephesus to meet

him in Miletus. In verse 28, we read what he said to the elders, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

In 1 Peter 5:1,2, we read, "**The elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you, serving as **overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, being examples to the flock." The only time the term "**pastor**" is used in Ephesians 4:11. And that is to be understood for one to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:3).

Of course, God's design is for men of age and wisdom to oversee the work of a congregation. I know personally there are times when 'business meetings' are needed, having served as an elder for eight years. However, I appreciate so much the term 'shepherd' which involves moving among the sheep in a personal way as a shepherd would be involved in caring for the flock in his care.

The apostle Peter gives faithful shepherds this assurance: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

*Raymond Elliott lives in Prattville, AL, and is a member of the Prattville church of Christ. He formerly preached for them as well as other places over the course of his long ministry.*

# When Good Men Do Nothing

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” (Edmund Burk)

John B. Daniels

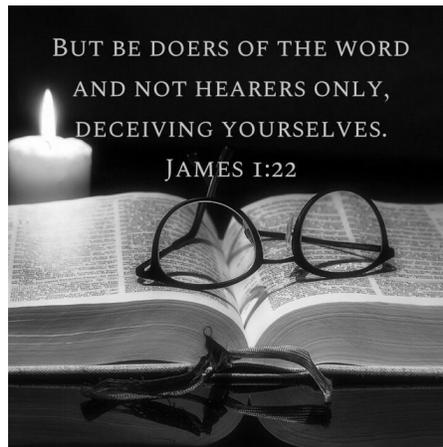
So much of the history of the struggle between good and evil can be explained by Edmund Burk’s observation. Time and again those who profess to be good seem to outnumber those who are evil, yet those who are evil seem to prevail far too often. Seldom is it that the numbers determine the outcome, but whether those who claim to be good men are willing to stand up and fight for what they know to be right. There are numerous examples of this sad and awful scenario being played out over and over again in the Scriptures.

When good men do nothing, they get nothing done. To be good, one must do good. The Lord commands His people to do good (Luke 6:35; Eph. 2:10). Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

In the parable of the talents, Jesus described a man who did nothing. When he received his Lord’s money, he “went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord’s money” (Matt. 25:18). When his Lord returned, he returned to the Lord just what he had been given (Matt. 25:25). Notice, the servant did not do any outright evil, such as stealing the money, but then neither did he do anything good. He did nothing and he got nothing good accomplished. Jesus said he was a “*wicked and slothful servant*” (Matt. 25:26).

Jesus rebuked the church at Laodicea for doing nothing. “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor

hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:15-17).



Too many Christians and too many churches do nothing. They are standing idly by, they are mere spectators. They sit on the sidelines instead of actively participating and working for the good. If good wins, they join in the celebration though they did nothing to produce the victory. If evil wins, they will complain long and loud though their own apathy helped produce the undesirable result.

When Jesus found a fig tree with “nothing thereon, but leaves only” He cursed the tree and “presently the fig tree withered away” (Matt. 21:19). What will He do with those who claim to be good and yet do nothing? John the Baptist warned, “And now also the axe

is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matt. 3:10; John 15:2).

When good men do nothing, evil triumphs. Evil, sin, and sinful men must be opposed. God commands those who are good, not just to avoid evil, but actively oppose it.

Christians are not to “...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). Those who do nothing about sin and evil, help the sin and evil to prevail. One who is silent becomes a partaker with them (Eph. 5:7).

In the days of Elijah, the silence of many had allowed the evil of Ahab and Jezebel to prevail throughout the land of Israel. “And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word (I Kings 18:21). The silence of the people spoke volumes about their indecisiveness and inaction. Their failure to stand up, speak up, and speak out permitted wicked and evil men to run rampant.

Jesus told of a traveler who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead. The men who did this were wicked and did a very wicked thing. But the Levite and

priest allowed this evil to continue by doing nothing as they each “passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31-32). Fortunately for the traveler, there was one man, a Samaritan, who was willing to stand up for what was right (Luke 10:33-36). Jesus warned “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30).

Today, there are preachers, elders, and Christians who fail and refuse to meet the real foe, refute error, and fight the enemy. Instead, they have turned to viciously savaging their own brethren. They are filled with bitterness and hatred and they maliciously attack, slander and misrepresent other Christians and gospel preachers.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Those who fail or refuse to do good in the face of evil are sowing some dangerous seeds. They are doing nothing good as Jesus commanded them to do; they are helping evil to win and have ceased being good and have become partakers of the evil they did nothing to stop.

Do not allow evil to triumph. Do not sit by and do nothing. Stand up and be counted. Speak up against evil and speak out against evil men and their sinful deeds.

*John B. Daniels is the associate minister for the Saint Andrews Road church of Christ, Columbia, SC*



# J E S U S

our intercessor

## Jeremy Butt

The existence of the Jewish nation living within the boundaries of the Persian kingdom hung in the balance. Mordecai the Jew would not bow down to the wicked Haman, and it filled Haman with rage.

When he found out that Mordecai was a Jew, he tricked King Ahasuerus into signing off on the eradication of the Jews because their laws were different and they did not observe the king’s laws, therefore it was not in his best interest to let them remain.

Mordecai found out about this and tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes and wailed loudly and bitterly in the midst of the city. When Esther found out about what Mordecai was doing and why he was doing it, there was correspondence back and forth between them. Mordecai wanted Esther to go to the king to implore his favor and plead with him for her people. Esther knew it was very dangerous because to approach the king without being called could mean death unless the king extends the golden scepter.

Desperate situations call for desperate measures. Esther knew she needed to act on this. After three days of fasting from the Jews, Esther went to plead with the king (Esther chapters 4-5).

Mordecai wanted Esther to step up to the plate and step in for the Jewish people. What was Esther going to do for the Jewish people regarding the

danger they were facing? She was going to intercede for them.

### What Is Intercession?

The idea conveyed with this word is meeting with to converse, to petition, to plead. It is used in the Bible both positively and negatively. In Romans 11:2 the idea is displayed as Elijah pled with God against Israel. This points back to the occasion in 1Kings 19:10 when he cried out to God thinking he was the only faithful one left in Israel.

The word is also shown in Moses pleading with God not to destroy the Israelites in three different instances: when they made the golden calf (Ex. 32); when they believed the bad reports of the ten spies (Num. 14); when they wanted Moses to intercede for them because of the fiery serpents (Num. 21).

Later, the picture would be painted of Moses as the one who saved God from destroying Israel “...had he not stood in the breach before Him...” (Ps. 106:23). Especially with the idea of pleading with God on behalf of Israel, I think we understand the idea behind this word intercession.

### How Does Jesus Intercede?

It might be helpful to take a more comprehensive approach to the intercession of Jesus. Going back to Isaiah chapter 53, the writer says: “...and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and

interceded for the transgressors” (v. 12). This is referencing the propitiation that Christ made as the suffering servant on the cross of Calvary.

Paul would later say of Jesus “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25-26). The atoning sacrifice was accomplished by none other than the Son of God, who took the punishment in our stead on the cross. This is one of the ways *intercession* is pictured in Jesus.

A second way *intercession* is used of Jesus, is through prayer. In Paul’s letter to the saints at Rome he had already discussed the Holy Spirit’s role in interceding during our prayer efforts. In the following verses, he also speaks to the saints having no one to condemn them because “Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Rom. 8:34).

We know that we pray in the name of Jesus, which is by His authority. Jesus told His disciples “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (Jn. 14:14). In this way, intercession is used also for what Jesus does for us. The writer of Hebrews says “therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25).

A third way *intercession* is used of Jesus is as our Advocate. The Apostle John says “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may

not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1).

The idea here is a spiritual defense attorney. Jesus is at the right hand of His Father making a plea for us. After all, it was for us He shed His blood, and that is why He is able to use to defend us before the Father. If we are walking in the light, there is no sin that is not covered by the blood of Jesus, and He remains to plead our case.

### **What Does It Mean for Me?**

First, the intercession Jesus made on the cross was for all, but it’s not accepted by all. Are you the beneficiary of that sacrifice? “...He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

Paul shows in Romans that this righteousness is accomplished through faith in Jesus Christ (3:22). He later shows in Galatians that sons of God through faith in Christ are those who have been baptized into Christ (3:26-27). Let’s make sure we are in Christ so we can take advantage of the benefits of that intercession Christ made on the cross.

Second, let’s also make sure we take advantage of the intercession available when we pray. It’s easy in the busy world we live in to neglect our prayer life. God wants to hear from us, so let’s remember how important it is for us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

We know we need intercession, but this kind is untapped whenever we don’t approach His throne. Knowing how Jesus intercedes for us, “...let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy

and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

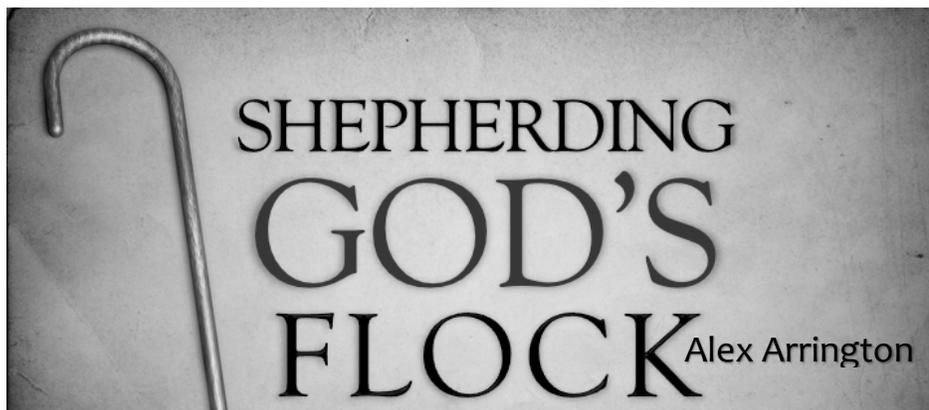
Third, take advantage of Jesus as your Advocate, who intercedes or pleads to the Father on your behalf. In order to make sure this is happening, let’s make sure we are walking in the light. If we’re walking in the light, we have the continual cleansing of the blood of Jesus (1 Jn. 1:7). If we’re asking for forgiveness when we do sin, that continual cleansing provides forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9). It’s in this context that Christ makes sure to plead our case before the Father.

The next time you think about the cross, think about the intercession where Christ stepped up and took that upon Himself for us. The next time you pray, think about Christ interceding for you. The next time you think about the sin and the guilt in your life, think about the intercession Christ makes as our Advocate. Christ intercedes for us! What blessed assurance that should give us!

It’s no wonder the apostle John is able to say “these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:13). The intercession of Jesus provides us with confidence in our salvation.

*Jeremy Butt is the minister for the North View church of Christ in Columbia, TN.*





The Bible tells us that shepherds oftentimes lived with their flock to protect them from danger (see Luke 2:8). The elders (shepherds) today may not protect the congregation from the same type of dangers as the shepherds in Bible times, but their overwatch is actually much more critical because today's shepherds must protect the members from the dangers that can destroy the soul.

Jesus is referred to as the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4) and His numerous examples of love, kindness, and gentleness should be what elderships try to emulate. Shepherding the congregational flock requires a firm hand at times (especially on matters of the Lord's word) but also a delicate and gentle hand at other times. One of the requirements of an elder is gentleness (1 Tim 3:3). In today's society, we don't usually associate gentleness with leadership; but it is indeed a trait that an elder should possess.

As we are aware, a flock of sheep cannot be driven; a successful eldership is one in which the shepherd carefully, watchfully, and gently leads the flock. Congregational members of the Lord's church should hear through the elders' words, and more importantly see through their actions, that the eldership is sincerely and deeply concerned for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of each of the members.

The elders' leadership role as shepherds and comforters needs to be known by the congregation, not in a haughty way ("hey, look at what we are doing"), but in a way that builds trust and confidence among the members. Members of the church should know that they can confidently and confidentially approach the shepherds with concerns. For a congregation to grow numerically and thrive spiritually, the congregation needs to see that the elders are able to operate at both ends of the spectrum: as a servant and as a leader.

Leadership is not innate. It is learned. There are obviously people who are more inclined to be leaders and there are people who shy away from all aspects of leadership. Leadership potential needs to be nurtured. Convincing a reluctant member to come out of their comfort zone, especially from a church standpoint, requires very gentle persuasion. If successful, it is one of the biggest blessings that a shepherd can give to the church and to the individual member.

Although God's approach to Moses in Exodus 4:10 wasn't necessarily gentle, and we see his excuses given, reluctant Moses eventually became one of the great leaders of the Bible.

Moses became a very successful leader. How do we? What are some

things that an eldership can do to ensure the congregation thrives?

One of the most important things many elderships could improve upon is the spiritual wellbeing of the congregation. Shepherds are often tied up doing the everyday tasks of management, maintenance, and financial concerns of the congregation. Every minute spent on these necessary and time-consuming tasks takes away from the spiritual activities which the shepherds should be focusing.

To improve our shepherding, we recently developed a visitation program with a goal of visiting all members at their home within a two-year period. This will require visits to more than 100 families and individual members in the congregation and we have currently accomplished about 20% of the visits.

Another objective we have put to paper is to make improvements in several areas, including:

1. Improve church leadership development process for men
2. Improve men's and women's spiritual development
3. Improve the community's awareness of the church
4. Improve our evangelism process
5. Improve our youth development process

Each of these five desired improvement areas have specific sub-categories/benchmarks that we developed to ensure we are making progress.

Shepherds take care of the flock and leaders take care of their people. In my 30 years in the Army (active duty and reserve) one of the things that was constantly drilled into your head was to make sure that you take care of your fellow soldiers. One of my lasting

memories, even after many decades has passed, was my first day at basic training. I was 17 years old and our platoon was jammed into a “cattle car” and driven to our platoon training area. Upon our arrival we hurriedly got off the cattle car, threw our duffle bags on the ground next to us and stood at attention. At this point, as we remain standing at attention, the drill sergeant yells (as only a drill sergeant can yell), “raise your hand if you consider yourself a leader!” Those of us who raised our hand were told to take a knee. Those who did not raise their hand were told to do push-ups.

The Army strives to develop future leaders and they have developed proven techniques over hundreds of years to ensure success. The church also needs to build future leaders. But we have not always done this well. Eldershops should communicate to the congregation the importance of building a leadership base from the next generation. Individuals with potential should be groomed so when the time comes there will be a seamless transition.

The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 3:1 that it is a good thing for a man to desire to be an elder. However, it is clearly understood that all men are not capable or qualified to be an elder, and yet for those individuals, there remains many works that can be done for the church.

Developing future church leaders is crucial to the long-term stability of the local congregations. Biblical leadership is something which should concern every member of the body of Christ. After all, as goes the leadership, so goes the church.

*Alex Arrington is one of the elders for the Saint Andrews Road church of Christ, Columbia, SC*

  
The Gospel Gleaner  
7 Brown Creek Dr.  
Fayetteville, TN 37334