

# Become a Shepherd of God's People

## Our Responsibility As Christians to One Another

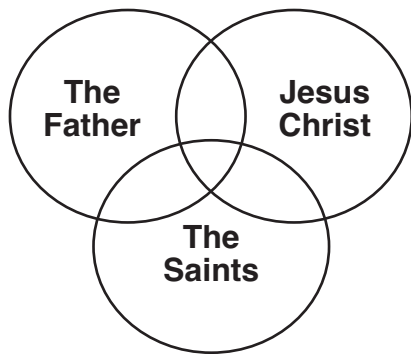
We see in the world around us examples of religious organizations that most people have come to accept as right and good. These are examples passed down through centuries, perhaps even millennia, wherein a "church" is defined as a big building, oftentimes with a steeple and cross affixed to it, that houses a group of believers with a certain set of doctrines that separate it from others: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Episodical, Church of Christ, Mennonite ... and on and on the list continues. Even these groups have various divisions within them. Truly, Satan is a divider and deceiver of those striving to know and obey the truths of God, and he is not about to encourage people to search the Scriptures to understand the truth in these matters. That would defeat his plan to confuse and disrupt the peaceful, lawful assembly of the elect who have been called out of this world of confusion ... for Satan is the author of that confusion (I Corinthians 14:33; Revelation 12:9; II Thessalonians 2:9).

Amidst this confusion, how is it possible to understand our function as God's people today? The answers, of course, must come from His word, which makes clear our function as saints of the Most High.

### Two Opposing Approaches to Government

Before we step into the commands to be shepherds, let us look briefly at the two systems of government within the ecclesia that are found nowadays ... one based on the nature of God, and the other based on the character of the Adversary.

#### God's government within the ecclesia



- The spirit of brotherhood, or each looking upon others as better than oneself (Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:2-15; 17:20-23; Romans 8:29; 12:10; Philippians 2:1-5; Ephesians 5:21; I Peter 5:5)
- Each is equally valuable, with "the least being the greatest" (Luke 9:48; Matthew 23:11-12)
- Service to others with one's spiritual gifts, given at baptism and the laying on of hands, is one's essential duty (I Corinthians 12; Romans 12:6-8; I Peter 4:10)
- A spirit of love and forgiveness (II Timothy 1:7; Galatians 5:22-23; John 13:34; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 13:8; Ephesians 4:2; Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 18:21-22)

#### Satan's government within the world



- The spirit of domination over others, looking upon others as more inferior down the pyramidal structure (Matthew 20:25; Luke 22:24-25)
- Value depends on position within the pyramid, with "the highest being the greatest" (Luke 22:25; *lordship* = *kyrieuo*, "to exercise control over: and *authority over* = *exousiazoo*, "to exercise power or authority over anyone"; Mark 10:42; *lordship* = *katakurieuo*, "to control, subjugate; *authority* = *katexousiazoo*, "to wield full privilege over")
- Control over others to order them as a slave (see the references above)
- A spirit of self-centeredness and narcissism (II Timothy 3:1-5; Romans 1:28-31; Galatians 5:19-21)

## Our Need to Be Shepherds

With the understanding of our need to be at one with our Creator and His Son Jesus Christ, it is imperative that we do as He has commanded, for we are His *workmanship* (*poiema*, “a product or fabric; Ephesians 2:10), and “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). We are “to walk as He walked” (I John 2:6; I Peter 2:21; Matthew 11:29; John 13:15), for His yoke — not the yoke of the world — is easy and light (Matthew 11:30).

It is imperative to realize our future as Kings and Priests, to reign on the earth with Jesus Christ (Revelation 5:10), when we will be just like Him (I John 3:2; Romans 8:29; I Corinthians 15:49; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 3:4; II Peter 1:4). We as the firstfruits saints are identified along with Jesus Christ as inheritors of everything He will inherit, as incredible as that may appear to us lowly fleshly beings. Note the following points of identity.

	<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>The Saints</i>
1. We have an eternal nature; we will live forever.	John 17:5; Revelation 1:5; 11;15	Revelation 3:21; I Thesalonians 4:16-17
2. We will receive rulership over the nations.	Revelation 19:14-16; 1:5	Revelation 2:26-27; 5:9-10
3. We will inherit all things.	Haggai 2:8; Colossians 1:15-17	Revelation 21:7; Matthew 5:3,5
4. We receive God’s spirit at baptism and the laying on of hands.	Matthew 3:16; Luke 3:21-22	Acts 2:38; 19:5-6
5. We are spiritual brothers.	Matthew 12:47-49; Romans 8:29	John 17:21; Hebrews 2:11,13
6. We will reign with the Father on His throne.	Revelation 21:22; Hebrews 8:1	Revelation 3:21
7. We will be worshipped.	Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10	Revelation 3:9; Isaiah 60:14
8. We pray directly to the Father.	John 17:1; Matthew 26:39	Matthew 6:6,9
9. The Father speaks directly to us.	Matthew 3:17; 17:5	Ephesians 6:17; II Timothy 3:16
10. We endure trials, suffer, and overcome.	Hebrews 4:15; Revelation 4:21	I Peter 1:6-7; Romans 8:17-18
11. We are ministered to by angels.	Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:42-43	Hebrews 1:13-14; 13:2
12. We forgive the sins of others.	Matthew 9:2-6; I John 1:9	Matthew 6:12-15; Luke 17:3-4
13. We are equivalent in the resurrection.	Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:4	I John 3:2; Philippians 3:21
14. The Law is written in our hearts, and we have His mind.	John 5:17-19; Isaiah 42:21	I Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5
15. We are given a name that no one else knows.	Revelation 19:12	Revelation 2:17
16. We are living examples to this world.	John 5:19, 30; 14:10	I Peter 2:21-23; John 13:15
17. We have the hope of great glory in the spirit.	Hebrews 12:2	Romans 8:18; I Corinthians 2:9
18. We have been sent into the world.	John 17:18	John 17:18
19. We are not of the world.	John 17:14, 16	John 17:14, 16
20. We are tempted with evil.	Hebrews 4:15	\James 1:12, 14

Note the clear statement of Paul in II Corinthians 3:18 (Phillips Translation).

“But all of us who are Christians have no veils on our faces, but reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured in ever-increasing splendor into His own image, and the transformation comes from the Lord who is the spirit.”

### **To Be His Disciples**

Our calling is to be disciples in the image of Christ every bit as much as the disciples were at the time of Christ. Wherever He went the disciples followed Him (Matthew 5:1; 8:23; 9:19; 16:24; Mark 6:1; 8:34; Luke 22:39; John 1:37), for He had the words of life that they all craved. His instructions to the apostles, the 70, and others of His followers were to...

- ... cast out demons (Matthew 10:1, 8; Mark 3:14-15; 6:13; 16:17)
- ... heal the sick (Matthew 10:1, 8; Mark 3:14-15; 6:13)
- ... raise the dead (Matthew 10:8)
- ... repent of their sins (Mark 6:12)
- ... speak in “new tongues” (Mark 16:17)
- ... preach the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:7; 24:14; all the saints were to preach this message at



the end time, and Jesus said in Luke 4:43 that “I must preach the kingdom of God ... because for this purpose I have been sent”; Luke 9:2, 60; Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:31)

As modern-day disciples we are to do likewise! The commission to cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, repent of sins, and preach the good news of the coming reinstatement of Eden on earth is given to us as well. In fact, this truth is summarized in Jesus’ commission to the eleven disciples in the mountain where they met with Him.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20).

### **We All Must Become Shepherds**

In the process of growing towards the fullness of Christ’s and the Father’s character (II Peter 3:18) it is critical to do certain things:

**1. Utilize the gifts of the spirit that have been granted to you.** These gifts are given to each of us as our Father in heaven has desired (I Corinthians 12:18), gifts which are described in all of I Corinthians 12. We are admonished to use these gift to uplift one another (I Peter 4:10; Romans 12:6-8), for our Father has invested heavily in us to bear fruit from His intervention in our lives.

**2. Grow in love — the agape sort — which is summarized in I Corinthians 13:1-8.**

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.”

Without love for one another, the sort that allowed Jesus to bear our sins and willingly die on the stake for each of us, we can never hope to achieve the mind of Him, for such outgoing selflessness is the principle that must utterly consume us. It is the essence of being subject one to another (Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3; I Peter 5:5). Jesus so greatly emphasized the need to love one another as He first loved us, for by this we will be identified as His disciples (John 13:34-35; 15:12). Moreover,

“Greater love has no one than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:13-14).

John in I John 3:14-16 states,

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us, and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

**3. Grow in forgiveness.** Forgiving others is such an essential part of God’s character that Jesus answered Peter’s question, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). Jesus’ answer is simple.

“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22).

In Luke the situation is made even more clear.

“If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4).

Forgiveness is to be extended to the person if he realizes he has sinned against you and asks for forgiveness, but if the offender does not ask for forgiveness, then we must ask the Father to forgive them, as

Christ did on the stake: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Forgiveness takes the stress of harboring hatred and grudges towards others, giving health and longer, more fulfilling life. The instructions are simple: “Forgive us of our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12), and as Paul said in Romans,

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, love peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink, for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head’. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21).

**4. Encourage and comfort one another in every place and opportunity you have**, to not just hang on to the truth but move forward in it with vigor and hope every day. Note how Paul and Peter encouraged the brethren in many circumstances (Acts 11:23; 16:40; 20:2,; 27:36; Romans 1:12; I Corinthians 14:3; Philipians 2:19; Colossians 2:2; I Thessalonians 3:2). The two Greek words translated *encourage* or *encouraged* are *parakaleo* (“to exhort, admonish, persuade, beseech, implore, encourage, comfort, to be cheered”) and *euthumos* (“good cheer or courage, cheerful”). Paul also strove to comfort the brethren, as in I Thessalonians 4:18, where he explained events surrounding the resurrection and the fact that the brethren would forever be with Jesus and the Father. Twenty-one verses in Acts through II Thessalonians use the words *parakaleo* (“to beg, beseech, encourage, comfort, to be cheered”), *paregoria* (“Comfort, solace, consolation”), or *paraklesis* (“exhortation, excitement, persuasion, cheering and supporting influence”). These verses all show that we need to uplift and persuade our brethren to endure to the end (Matthew 24:13) in the midst of an evil and perverse world, for “... lawlessness will abound, and the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

This encouragement of our brethren ought to flow throughout fellowship opportunities, as described in I Corinthians 14. All of the brethren are encouraged to *prophecy* [*propheteo*], or speak inspired words from one’s indwelling spirit, while others *judge* [*diakrino*] what is said. By everyone participating in speaking, the opportunities to uplift one’s brethren are multiplied compared to having just one person speak in a corporate, programmed type of structure.

**5. Now, to touch upon the heart of the issue this study is driving at — striving to be a shepherd of God’s people \_ we must indeed follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and become shepherds, like Him.** Peter called Jesus the Chief Shepherd (I Peter 5:4) ... not the only shepherd but the Chief Shepherd, because He is the “... firstborn of many brethren ...” (Romans 8:29). He is the One prophesied to “...shepherd My people Israel” (Matthew 2:6). As the elect, we understand that after the resurrection we will be ruling as Kings and Priests on the earth, teaching survivors of the Great Tribulation the wonderful ways of the Creator as the world becomes transformed into an Eden, to replace the one that was lost 6,000 years earlier.

Speaking of the new age, Yahweh Elohim spoke these words to Isaiah:

“And through the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:20-21).

God’s people, the resurrected saints, will truly be shepherds in the new age, teaching people in the various nations the truths of living successful, abundant lives based on the laws of the Eternal dwelling within them. In John 10:11, and 14, Jesus is quoted, “I am the good Shepherd, and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.” What is said about God’s people as being shepherds? Quite a lot! Take a look at Acts 20:28.

“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.”

*overseer* = *episkopos*, “an inspector, an overseer, a watcher, guardian.” Note that there is no indication here of the overseer being a dominant overlord, but he is a helper, an uplifter, a servant of the brethren of which he is one. As Paul stated in II Corinthians 1:14, “Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.”

*dominion over* = *kyrieuo*, “to be lord over, mastery over.”

*faith* = *pistis*, “faith, belief, from persuasion.”

Paul was at Miletus, having sent for the elders [older members] of the ecclesia at Ephesus, and when they had assembled he made them aware of their need to be watchmen and guardians — shepherds — of the brethren in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), since there would be wolves that would come along after he left, teaching false doctrines and trying to lead brethren after themselves (Acts 20:29-30). ***THESE ELDERS WERE MADE OVERSEERS BY GOD’S SPIRIT — IT SAYS NOTHING ABOUT HANDS HAVING BEEN LAID ON THEM — TO LOVINGLY WATCH OVER AND GUARD THE YOUNGER BRETHREN FROM FALSE DOCTRINES, SINCE THESE OLDER BRETHREN [ELDERS] WERE MORE EXPERIENCED IN LIFE AND ABLE TO ACT AS SHEPHERDS.***

The point made here is quite obvious. Older members of the ecclesia, through the action of the spiritual gifts imparted to them, are qualified to be shepherds, and are declared so by Paul. They can faithfully shepherd the flock and help guide — not domineer — the younger, less experienced brethren through troublesome situations. It is God’s way: all of his elect gain experience from age and circumstances in life they face, and serve as guides within the flock. We may indeed generalize here and claim that ALL ELDERS ARE SHEPHERDS IN GOD’S ECCLESIA, especially those who labor in word and doctrine. These older brethren who “rule well” should be counted worthy of double honor (I Timothy 5:17).

Peter supports Paul’s view of the older people of the congregations being shepherds, when he said,

“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; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (I Peter 5:1-3).

Peter continues his discussion by showing that all of the brethren are to be subject to one another, and in particular the younger people, were to submit to the older brethren. While all are brothers in Christ, there is the need of the younger saints to show respect to those who are older and wiser.

### **You Older Brethren, Be Shepherds!**

Thus, we have shown through Scripture that the older people amongst the elect are to be shepherds of others, and in a real sense WE ARE ALL TO SHEPHERD ONE ANOTHER, FOR WE ARE ALL TO BE SUBJECT ONE TO ANOTHER (Ephesians 5:21; I Peter 5:5). This subjection extends to the younger as well as the older members, but the older brethren, because of their accumulated wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, have the added responsibility of helping guide the younger members of the elect through a tumultuous world. We are all to serve one another with the gifts of the spirit that God has given each of us (I Peter 4:10; Romans 12:4-8; I Corinthians 12).

Perhaps the biggest stumblingblock to the correct understanding of this concept of being a shepherd is

the idea that an elder is someone who has been granted an office in the ecclesia by the laying on of hands. Such an idea is patently false, for the word for elder as used in the New Testament, *presbyteros*, means an older person, and nothing more. Sometimes older brethren have hands laid on them to show recognition that they have a certain job to do for a certain period of time, but an elder is not an office holder. It is merely an age designation, and in Scripture is used for those both inside and outside of the ecclesia.

We desperately need to support one another within the ecclesia so we can endure to the end (Matthew 24:13). We all have a responsibility to build up one another, especially as we see the end of the age approaching quickly, so let us be about that business!