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Should Not the Shepherds Feed the Flock?

Recognize the question in the title? It is found in Ezekiel 34:2. God expressed His unhappiness with the shepherds in the land because they weren't "feeding" (ministering to) His sheep. Their condition was unacceptable and God issued a strong admonition to the shepherds. In short, the sheep were not being cared for or were a flock "as without a shepherd." Spiritually speaking, God assessed the sheep of Israel as being unfed. They were sick and not strengthened, diseased and not healed, scattered and not brought back, lost and not sought after (Ezekiel 34:4). God was not pleased with the ministry He had entrusted to the shepherds.

Would we pass God's test today with the flock He has given us? In the New Testament, Jesus, being moved with compassion, observed God's people in a similar state—they were "distressed" and "dispirited," functioning "as sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Brothers, if we're honest with ourselves about the Church today, I believe we'd have to say she's pretty unhealthy. The Church today is spiritually sick, diseased, scattered, and lost.

Our role as God's shepherds requires us to nurture (feed) the body of Christ. We must spend "body life" time with sheep in addition to leading them. The writer of Hebrews makes this very clear: "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate

their faith." Jesus said, "...the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:3-5). Sheep recognize the voice(s) of those who care for them and the genuineness of the intimacy is such that "strange voices" (unsound doctrine, teaching, and methodologies) are ineffective in causing sheep to stray from truth.

Finally, Paul's heartfelt and emotional exhortation to the elders from Ephesus defines clearly what pastors should do: "Be on guard for yourselves and for 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" (Acts 20:28). Pastors must insure that personal spiritual maintenance takes place in their own lives. The church is dependent upon and is desperately in need of spiritually healthy shepherds. We must be in the Word and the Word in us beyond just putting a sermon together or leading Bible studies. Our lives must reflect that we've been with Jesus in word and deed. The Word is what we live, breathe, and eat—it is our life! Paul then says to be on guard for the flock. We are overseers of their souls as we feed (care for) them and protect them with our very lives. Also, note a key word in the text: among. We are "overseers" "among" the flock, placed there by the Holy Spirit. Being among the flock allows and fosters a time

of intimacy and caring for sheep. Though the Church does not belong to pastors but to Jesus, we are under-shepherds of sorts with a call to the stewardship of Jesus' sheep. In light of that, we are not to lord our leadership over the flock with a Gentile mindset or ways (Mark 10:42). God is the God of relationships—intimate relationships—and He desires a oneness of true love in our relationship with one another and with Him.

Brothers, we live in a day and time when shepherding souls is not only a must but a God-given mandate. The stakes are too high in the culture to let sheep wander unfed as without a shepherd. Healthy sheep in cultural darkness are what God had in mind when Jesus pronounced us as the "light of the world," the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13-14). We have been empowered by God to fulfill the calling to shepherd souls. Let us find ourselves passionately feeding ourselves so we can feed (care for) His sheep as we expectantly await His return.

Scripture references from the New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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