

FEEDING OR FLEECING THE FLOCK?



TEXT: *Acts 20:28-30* **Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.**

THESIS: To reveal the nature of true shepherds, their flock and the dangers to the flock.

INTRO.: A. An older preacher gave some sage advice to a young preacher: "Feed the sheep, lead the sheep and shoot the wolves." Later when asked the best advice he had received as a young preacher he said "Shoot the sheep, fleece the sheep and feed the wolves." Paul gives the best advice to the pastors of the church at Ephesus: Feed the flock, lead the flock and take heed to the flock." V.28

C. The Lord Himself identified the people as sheep (collectively as a flock) and the Pastor as Shepherd. The true man of God will feed, lead and take heed to the flock and the true sheep will follow the shepherd. Both the shepherd and the sheep need to be dedicated to the work God has established here.

I. GOD SENT SHEPHERDS:

Jeremiah 3:15 *And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

Ephesians 4:11-12 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

A. God Ordained:

NOTE: The word "ordained" means to "order" or "appoint." A pastor who is truly ordained will be able to lead and feed **"with knowledge and understanding."** Before men lay hands of ordination on a man's head, God must have already laid His hands on their heart!

B. God Trained:

ILLUS.: If you needed open-heart surgery & your neighbor said he could save you thousands of dollars because he had studied the subject on the internet and his encyclopedia and had a good sharp penknife, you would say "no way! I need a specialist." There are many self-styled, self-called, self-ordained "shepherds" around. Beware those God has not called or sent.

II. GOD LED SHEEP:

A. Sheep Like Green Pastures: **"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures..."**

1. True sheep love to graze & feast upon God's Word.
2. True sheep don't have to be begged, cajoled or bribed to come to church to be w/the flock under the shepherd.
 - a. True sheep like to eat & stay as long as they are being fed; they have no desire to go elsewhere and are not looking for "greener" pastures.

NOTE: A friend of mine said the reason the grass looks greener on the other side of the fence is because the devil has been there with his paint bucket!

Some "sheep" wear alarm watches and decide when the preacher should stop preaching. That same crowd never watches the time they spend at the table or in front of the TV watching a ball game – in fact they look forward to "extra innings."

b. Sheep love the shepherd & the food he serves & they never deliberately miss "feeding time."

B. Sheep Like Still Waters: **"He leadeth me beside the still waters."**

1. True sheep will not drink from fast-moving, troubled waters.
2. True sheep want no part of quarrelling, backbiting, strife, division – unlike wolves & goats.

C. Sheep Like Shearing Time:

1. Sheep don't do well w/too much wool, they become vulnerable to their enemies, get easily entangled w/branches, briars, collect burrs. **"Thou anointest my head with oil"**
2. When the sheep goes to be sheared it is walking slowly and clumsily, but afterwards it leaps and jumps for joy.

ILLUS.: How like the true sheep who gives what he has, not grudgingly, but cheerfully. He doesn't groan & moan over being sheared. Wolves and goats are not sheared easily, but sheep enjoy it! True sheep give their time and treasure willingly, even cheerfully.

Shearing and fleecing are not the same! The true shepherd shears the sheep for the work of the ministry. The hireling fleeces the sheep for his own selfish ambitions.

III. SATAN DIRECTED GOATS:

A. Goats Disturb the Flock:

1. Goats may be mixed with sheep but they are natural troublemakers.
2. Goats lead the sheep in opposition to the shepherd's leading.
4. Goats are always butting the sheep and the shepherd: "I know what the pastor says, BUT...!"
 - a. Goats are never satisfied w/green pastures & their appetite is different from sheep.

ILLUS.: Sheep are clean animals as to their diet; goats are scavengers & will eat almost anything. A sheep's nature is tranquil; a goat's nature is stubborn & has an appetite for garbage!

b. Goats will destroy the pasture and leave nothing for the sheep.

B. Goats Like to Roam:

1. Goats are never content to stay with the shepherd or the flock, but are always looking for something new and different; sheep must follow the shepherd – the goats will lead them astray!
2. Goats are not totally worthless; you can get some milk from a goat; they make contribute something, but it is hardly worth the aggravation & turmoil they cause.

IV. SATAN SENT WOLVES: (TEXT)

A. Wolves Love High Places:

1. They do not accept authority, but they love to be the authority.
2. Wolves love to be where they can watch over the sheep they intend to prey upon.
3. Sheep are followers; wolves are leaders.

B. Wolves Run In Packs:

1. A single wolf is not that dangerous, but in the pack he is treacherous.
2. A wolf seeks out his own kind and organizes a plan of attack to assault the sheep and divert the shepherd.

C. Wolves Avoid Shepherds:

1. There is an uneasy "peace" between the wolf and the shepherd.
2. But they never let the sheep out of their sight.
 - a. The sheep become nervous when the wolf is around.
 - b. Real sheep can always spot a wolf & will reveal his presence to the shepherd.

V. HEAVEN SENT SHEEP DOGS:

ILLUS.: Sheep dogs are the faithful, loyal assistants to the shepherd. They are not shepherds, but have been trained to help the shepherd. The sheep dogs guard the sheep from the goats & the wolves, but also keep the sheep from straying too far from the flock.

A. Sheep Dogs Are Respectful:

1. The sheep learn that the sheep dog is an extension of the shepherd.
2. The shepherd cannot be everywhere guarding the sheep so the sheep dogs are placed strategically around the flock.

B. Sheep Dogs Are Loyal to the Shepherd:

1. They will fight a wolf to the death, but will never turn on the shepherd.
2. The sheep dog is not guarding the shepherd, but the sheep.
 - a. He is not there to guard the shepherd against mistakes, but to guard the sheep against attacks.
 - b. He is there to keep the sheep from straying, not to instruct the shepherd how to tend the flock.
 - c. He is to try to keep the sheep as close to the shepherd as possible, never to come between the sheep and the shepherd.

ILLUS.: Every so often a sheep dog "turns wolf." He sees the "freedom" of the wolf and longs to be out from under the authority of the shepherd. He then becomes a threat to both the sheep and the shepherd & can never again be trusted. His usefulness is over!

CONCL.: Do you have the characteristics of a SHEEP? A GOAT? A WOLF? A SHEEP DOG? We need more sheep and sheep dogs, but fewer goats and wolves!

The Pastor's job is to feed the sheep, not fleece them. He is to lead them, not to beat them into submission. He is to protect them or "take heed" to the flock – to warn them and care for their needs. ***He is to give his life for the sheep!***