

Scripture Memory Passage - Deuteronomy 6:4-5

One pastor relates his conversation with a visitor following the Sunday morning worship gathering. "So this church is like your business, and you're in sales, and God is the product." We might laugh this off, but how many people have this sort of view of the church? How many have a different view, but one that is equally wrong? How well do we understand the church, and how well does our interaction as a church communicate accurately what the church is? *The church is compared to a flock of sheep; defenseless, dependent, susceptible to danger and disease, needing shepherds to protect and provide for them.* Of the 7 Core Values we have as a church, this one is probably the one least understood. Why would such a strange concept make it into our Core Values? Because, as we learned last week, it's Grounded in God's Word. This morning we're going to see just how grounded in Scripture this is, and how God uses this for our good and his glory. **God has entrusted his blood-bought church to the care of shepherd leaders.** The church is not a social club, a Sunday activity, spiritual dispensary, but the people of God existing for the worship of God, growth in relationship with God, and testifying to the grace of God in Christ to the world. We could say that the church exists to glorify God by knowing Christ more fully and making Christ more fully known.

Scripture Passage: Ezekiel 34; 1 Peter 5; Acts 20; Hebrews 13:17

While it might seem that our point this morning is only directed to the elders of the local church, I want you to realize that this is a mutual relationship. There is a mutual responsibility. Shepherds are to shepherd the local church, but those shepherded are needing to allow themselves to be shepherded by the shepherds. We've taught and preached and spoken a fair bit at Pillar about the relation of elders to the church, but I want to emphasize equally this morning the relation of the church to the elders.

Shepherd the flock of God

1. **1 Peter 5:1-2a** "*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you...*" Peter isn't offering a suggestion, asking the elders to take this into consideration. He gives them an exhortation. This is important, and Peter calls the elders to action. Why was this so important to Peter?

1. **John 21:15-17** Peter has been out fishing. Remember, Peter denied knowing or being associated with Jesus while Jesus was on trial. His Master who loved him, and even died for him, yet Peter denied him. Now, in **John 21** he is out fishing, and Jesus appears to Peter and the other disciples with him. Jesus then speaks to Peter after breakfast is finished and he gives him these commands - "*Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.*" Jesus knows that he will soon ascend into heaven, and he is commissioning the care of his blood-bought church to Peter and human agents. The church is precious to Jesus, and he wants to ensure that she is cared for. In **Acts 20:28** Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders, telling them, "*to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*" Jesus loves his church, he died for his church, and he wants his church cared for. That is why this is so important to Peter.

2. So Peter now, in **1 Peter 5**, must have that vivid memory in the forefront of his mind as he writes to these elders. He tells them to shepherd the precious flock of God among them, exercising oversight.

1. Let's pause quickly to talk about a few terms that are important here. Peter is speaking to the elders (*presbuteros*), he commands them to shepherd (*poimaino* - pastor), exercising oversight (*episkopeo*). Also **Acts 20:28** Paul is speaking to elders (**v.17**), saying the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, and they are to care for (*poimaino* - shepherd) the church of God. These three terms are all speaking of the same office and work, just drawing out different aspects of the work.

3. "*shepherd the flock of God that is among you*" - Peter says the elders are to shepherd the flock that is among you, that is, those local to you. And realize an elder is not above, beyond, or apart from the church, but a true elder is among the church.

1. So Peter compares the local church to a flock of sheep. This might seem strange to us, but it would've make great sense to the original readers of this letter. In fact, referring to the people of God wasn't something that Peter even came up with himself, but a comparison that God has made. In **Genesis 48:15** as Jacob is blessing his son Joseph, Jacob says that God has been his shepherd all his life. In **2 Samuel 5:2** we read that the Lord told David to be shepherd of his people Israel. We're all familiar with **Psalms 23**, which says the Lord is my shepherd.

2. But I want you to turn to **Ezekiel 34** this morning. In this passage we learn a great deal about God's care for his people, his desire for the leaders of his people, and the nature of his people.

God as Shepherd of the flock

1. **Ezekiel 34:1-16** In the first 10 verses we read God's rebuke of the shepherds of Israel, that is, the leaders of God's people.

1. **vv.2-3** they feed themselves instead of feeding the sheep
2. **v.4** they failed to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, brought back the stray, seek after the lost, and lead with care and compassion, instead ruling with force and harshness.
3. **vv.5-6** because of the failure of the shepherds, the people of God were scattered, they became food for predators, they wandered to areas where they would be exposed to grave danger, scattered and separated, and nobody searched or sought them out.
4. But while this is an indictment of the shepherds, it tells us a great deal about the sheep, doesn't it?
 1. I read earlier this week that a sheep can become completely lost only a short distance away from home. Most animals have the instincts to find their way home, but not sheep. Without a guide back to safety and protection, it will stay separated and die, either from exposure to elements or attack from other animals. Also, sheep must be led right to water. It must be Goldilocks water, too (not too cold and not too hot). They know where their watering hole is, but they won't be able to find new sources of water if they are far separated from their normal source. Sheep need constant watch and protection. They have no defenses. On a few occasions I've had the pleasure of hearing a man named Gayle Erwin teach about the nature of God's people being like sheep. He's really a funny man, like a bald Santa Claus in a Hawaiian shirt, with suspenders. He was talking about wolves coming into a flock of sheep and how a sheep, with big fangs, camouflaged headband, and fully automatic machine guns, takes out the wolves. He calls this sheep, "Lambo." And we laugh because, even though we might not know much about sheep, we know they're not like this. Most animals have some sort of defense, whether it be speed to outrun their predator, horns or teeth to fight, or some sort of mechanism like a skunk to ward off predators, but not sheep.
 2. Do you get the idea? God doesn't compare us to sheep because we're cute and cuddly, but because we're defenseless, dependent, susceptible to danger and disease, and in need of protection and provision, because we wander and stray.
5. Notice what God says in **Ezekiel 34:11-16**. He will search for them and seek them out. He won't lose even a single one. God will rescue them, because they can't rescue themselves. He will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, assembling them as his flock. He will feed them with good pasture, and care for them so tenderly that they are safe to lie down. Then, vv.15-16 he will be shepherd, make them lie down, seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, strengthen the weak.
6. In **John 10**, Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd, and he lays down his life for the sheep. The flock is the church of God, purchased with the blood of Christ, and cared for and protected by God himself. But he has also entrusted this care to under-shepherds, pastor/elders who are called and qualified and appointed by the church to care for the church on behalf of God.

God's entrusted under-shepherds of the flock

1. Turn to **Hebrews 13**. In **v.7** the author says to remember your leaders, those who speak God's Word to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. This is similar to what Peter says in **1 Peter 5:3** that pastor/elders are to be examples to the flock. Look down further in the chapter also, to **v.17**. The author writes there that the church is to obey and submit to their leaders. I know those are unpopular words in this day and age, but they're for the good of the church and the glory of God. He qualifies this. Obey and submit because your leaders are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. This is an awesome responsibility, and one no elder should take lightly.
 1. Your elders are accountable to God for the care of your souls. The Puritans referred to pastors as "physicians of the soul." As J.I. Packer says, "A physician's business is to check, restore, and maintain the health of those who commit themselves to his care. In the same way, the minister should get to know the people in his church and encourage them to consult him as their soul-doctor. If there is any kind of spiritual problem, uncertainty, bewilderment, or distress, they are to go to the minister and tell him, and the minister needs to know enough to give them health-giving advice. That's the Puritan ideal. Just as a physician must know physiology, the Christian minister must know what spiritual health is. It's pure knowledge of the will of God, the true gospel of God. It's regular praise and regular prayer. It's acceptance of responsibility in the family, in the church, and in the larger community where you do business. That's spiritual health. And falling short of that calls for intervention, rebuke, correction, and instruction in righteousness." (**Grounding in God's Word**)

2. Elders aren't executives, marketing experts, entertainers, psychologists, or just talking heads, but are entrusted by God to care for your spiritual well-being by knowing you, feeding you, leading you, and protecting you.
3. Your elders don't take this responsibility as a light thing. We meet regularly together to look over passages we'll be preaching through, talk about needs and victories among the people of Pillar, and to pray for you by name. Who is idle that needs admonishment, who is fainthearted that needs encouragement, who is weak that needs help (1 Thess. 5:14)?
4. But on the other side of the coin, do you recognize the care your elders have for you, and are you willing to come under their care? When trouble and difficulty come, do you let your elders know so that we can be praying for you? When times are turbulent and you need help, do you turn to your elders to seek counsel and wisdom from the sufficient Word of God, to guide you through the storm? When decisions need to be made and there isn't clarity or peace, perhaps there is even confusion, do you, flock of God, turn to the shepherds among you? We don't seek to control your life; we're not going to be arranging marriages or telling you what color to paint your house, but to help you understand and apply the gospel to your life, to be molded and shaped and changed by it, to think and act in response to the love of God for you and the revelation of God to you, that you might know the greatest joy by bringing God the greatest glory.

Conclusion: God has entrusted his blood-bought church to the care of shepherd leaders. It's my sincere hope that today we have come to better understand this Core Value, and are better positioned to see it carried out in the life of Pillar Bible Fellowship. May this word affect us and change us, that we would be a spiritually healthy church, growing in the grace and knowledge of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and testifying to the world of his transforming love.

Family



Table Talk

October 23, 2016

Family Discussion

1. As a child, being properly cared for is hugely important. I'm sure each of you can think of many ways your parents presently care, and have cared, for you daily. How do your parents guide and teach you? What kinds of things do they protect you from? How do you know they love and treasure you?
2. Your parents shepherd you like precious little lambs, making sure you are safe and cared for. Sheep, little lambs, that is what you are in God's eyes, too! Did you know this? Christ Jesus is your Shepherd- did you know this! It's true! What do you know about sheep and their ability to care for themselves? What do you know about a shepherd's job in caring for the sheep?
3. Do you know who the elders of your local church are? Do you know what their job is? God has given the elders of your local church the responsibility and privilege to shepherd the people of His church in spiritual matters: to teach, to protect, to encourage and love. Elders are in a role to lead God's precious, blood-bought church in the truth of God's Word in a devoted and humble way. How can you come under the care of your elders?

GOD'S TRUTH

God has entrusted His blood-bought church to the care of shepherd leaders!

Key Verse

"...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock"
1 Peter 5:2-3

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into God's Word...

2. JOHN 10:11, 14; PSALM 23
3. 1 PETER 5:1-5; ACTS 20:28; HEBREW 13:17

SCRIPTURE MEMORY:
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5



"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)