

What Sheep Should Say to Their Shepherds

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

Last week, we talked about shepherds from **Psalm 23** and learned the shepherd's role in the congregation is to lead, feed, protect and restore the sheep. I hope you'll take that as a goal for personal growth whether you are an elder or not. This week, however, I think we should balance that by taking a look at the sheep. After all, while the shepherds have some pretty significant responsibilities, the sheep have responsibilities as well. A few months ago, I was able to sit at the feet of Bill Hall at the Lanton congregation's monthly men's study. He ended his session on the eldership with a list of statements we as sheep in the congregation should say to our shepherds. I want to share those with you.

To be honest with you, I fear we sometimes get out of balance on things. You all know I agree that each and every one of us needs to study, develop our own faith and pursue righteousness on our own. We won't go to heaven on our shepherds' faith and righteousness (cf. **Ezekiel 14:14, 20**). I also know elders can be wrong sometimes and may need to be rebuked before all (cf. **I Timothy 5:20**). However, I fear we have taken this individuality and this responsibility to hold even shepherds accountable to God's word to such an extreme that we forget we are the sheep and they are the shepherds. This doesn't mean we never talk with them about issues. It doesn't mean we never voice concerns to them about where we think they may be missing something. But it does mean they are the shepherds and we are not. We need to remember that the sheep's job is not to lead the shepherds, but vice versa. So, what are we saying or what ought we to be saying when we select men as elders or become part of a congregation that already has shepherds?

Discussion:

- I. "We're selecting you as overseers and we're willing to place ourselves under you."
 - A. In **I Timothy 3:1** and **Titus 1:7**, Paul called the elders overseers (some translations use "bishop"). The word translates "*episkopos*," which literally means a watcher over. This is a word picture that literally presents something I experienced in high school. I was in marching band. When we were being taught how to march and when we were marching, our instructor and our drum major actually got up in a small tower and oversaw us. They got above us and looked down to where we were so they could actually see what we were doing and correct us when we needed it. They were over seers.
 - B. However, if shepherds are the overseers, we are the watched who are under. If we are going to appoint men as bishops and overseers, we are agreeing to allow them to watch us. We are agreeing to submit to their watchful eyes. We are agreeing to submit under them.
 - C. **Acts 20:28** says the shepherds are to pay careful attention to us because the Holy Spirit has made them overseers. We need to think about that for just a moment. Paul did not say the congregation made them overseers. He said the Holy Spirit did. I recognize this happened through growth in the revelation of the Holy Spirit, but we need to back up for a minute and recognize that the shepherds are not subject to our oversight. They don't have to turn to us for approval of their shepherding. We are under them because God made them shepherds. If you can't submit to an eldership, you go to one you can. Once you agree to submit to them, then do so.
- II. "We're choosing you to be our shepherds and we'll follow you as long as you lead where the Chief Shepherd leads."
 - A. **John 10:3-4** presents an amazing picture of shepherding. The sheep hear the voice of their shepherd and then they follow him. That is true with our Chief Shepherd Jesus, but that is also true with our congregational shepherds. When we hear their voice, we need to follow. Certainly, some churches have a problem of shepherds who don't actually lead. But for each of these, there are also sheep who simply won't follow. They dig their little hooves into the earth and buck against the authority of the shepherds. They decide that they know better than the shepherds and simply won't go where the shepherds lead. Sometimes they demonstrate a kind of "I'll show you" attitude. Of course, almost always they'll throw out some kind of Bible verse to say why they don't have to submit to the shepherds.
 - B. Obviously, there are exceptions. Clearly, our shepherds are to submit to the chief Shepherd (**I Peter 5:4**). We know **Acts 5:29**, we must obey God rather than men. If our shepherds start to

lead in a direction contrary to the chief Shepherd, we must not follow. But, please understand there is a big difference between leading in a direction contrary to the chief Shepherd and simply not going where we want them to go.

- C. For instance, I remember once having lunch with an elder from another congregation. While together, he received a phone call about one of the teachers who had decided he didn't like the part of the curriculum he was supposed to teach for the junior high class so he was going to teach what he wanted. I listened as the elder responded that the brother was not obligated to teach a class. If he didn't want to teach that material, he didn't have to teach. But if he was going to teach he would teach the curriculum selected. This was a case of a sheep not wanting to follow, not because the sheep believed the shepherds were going against the chief Shepherd, but just because the sheep didn't like the shepherds' choice. We need to remember, we are the sheep. The shepherd's job is to lead; ours is to follow.

III. "We will not listen to an accusation against you except by the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses."

- A. **I Timothy 5:19** says we are not to admit, receive or listen to an accusation against an elder accept on the basis of two or three witnesses. Of course, this passage is actually written to Timothy as an evangelist. As an evangelist myself, I can tell you I know why. Sadly, there is too much politicking in churches these days. This really happens when an evangelist moves to a congregation. The different parties and cliques, especially those groups of sheep that don't want to follow the elders or at least one of the elders, start vying for the evangelist's ear. That is sad and unscriptural. I am commanded not to receive an accusation against an elder accept on the basis of two or three witnesses. So, unless you've got you and two other folks with you who witnessed the sin, not just those that believe you when you say you witnessed it, then don't even bring it to me. I will not admit, receive or listen to it.
- B. While this statement is directly made to Timothy as an evangelist, the principle applies across the board for all of us. When we select shepherds, we're saying we will not listen to gossip about them. We will not receive that. This doesn't mean we'll go ahead and hear and then decide not to do anything with it. We won't even receive it. We won't accept it. We won't listen to it.
- C. Yes, if there are 2 or 3 witnesses we may then go to the shepherd. If the report is true and the shepherd persists in the sin, refusing to repent, we must rebuke him before the entire congregation (**I Timothy 5:20**). However, we shouldn't even listen to the accusation if it comes from only one source.

IV. "You can count on us to cooperate with you in anything that is lawful."

- A. According to **Ephesians 4:11**, God gave us pastors to equip us for the work of ministry. Their job is to build us up and provide us with training so we can minister to one another and minister the gospel to the world. That means each and every one of us is part of the work here. Our shepherds lead us, they challenge us, they equip us to work. That means we have a responsibility to work. By selecting men as shepherds, we are agreeing to cooperate in the work they establish for us.
- B. Allow me to share with you one of the great causes of discouragement for elderships everywhere. I've heard more than one elder sadly ask, "Why doesn't anyone ever want to meet with us to ask what they can do for the work here? Why is it always because they are trying to express something they don't like?" Certainly, there is an appropriate time to share with the elders concerns you have regarding the congregation. But why not be a joy to the elders as well and instead of coming to them to straighten them out or express dislike, why not come volunteering to work and help move the congregation in a positive direction.

V. "We will conduct ourselves so you can do your work with joy and not with groaning."

- A. **Hebrews 13:17** says we need to remember our shepherds are watching over us because they have to give an account of us when they stand before God in judgment. Their responsibility is to be ever watchful. Ours is to let them do this with joy and not with groaning. We are to make it as easy for them as possible and as joyous.
- B. We do this by working on our own growth instead of waiting to be pushed and challenged. We do this by cooperating as we noted in the last point. We do this by following God's will. We do

this by listening when the elders speak and following where they lead. We do this by submitting and not challenging their authority. We need to make their leadership as easy as possible.

- VI. "We will pray for you and be understanding as you grow in your work of shepherding."
- A. Sadly, some sheep can't seem to respect the shepherds unless they are perfect. They pick apart every little thing the shepherds do acting as if every little mistake makes the elder's qualification suspect. The fact is, even though the qualifications demonstrate maturity (**I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**), even elders are not perfect. They are growing just as we are. **II Peter 1:5-8** applies to shepherds as well as the sheep.
 - B. That means we need to be understanding as our shepherds grow. We need to recognize they'll make mistakes. Instead of kicking them while they're down, we need to pray for them. I'm not aware of a passage that specifically commands us to pray for our shepherds. Yet, when we consider Paul's request for prayers as an apostle, I think we can recognize our shepherds need our prayers as well. We need to pray that God hold them up, that they have courage and boldness, that they'll have opportunity to lead, that they'll grow. We need to pray with and for our shepherds.
- VII. "If you need to talk to me about anything, I will agree to talk and set up a suitable time to talk because I know that is an integral part of your responsibility as a shepherd."
- A. Sheep are willing to go along, but when the shepherds come calling, they often start packing their bags. We need to understand that if shepherds are going to lead us, they've got to know us. If shepherds are going to restore us, they've got to talk to us. We must be willing to talk to them. If they call us up and ask for a meeting, instead of blowing them off, we need to work to meet with them.
 - B. This is really part of the earlier statements that say we're willing to submit to the elders and we will cooperate with them. Let's face it, if the elders' job is to give sound instruction (cf. **Titus 1:9**), then we need to be willing to receive that instruction. When an elders starts calling you, don't put it off or run from it, get with them and receive the instruction they have to offer.
- VIII. "We do not want you to domineer us, but we will respect you and the leadership you provide."
- A. **Hebrews 13:7** says we are to remember those who lead us and those speak the word of God to us. That is, we are to take note of them. Included in this is the respect we should have for them because of the work they do on our behalf.
 - B. This means we need to show respect in the way we speak to our shepherds. It means we need to show respect in the way we speak about our shepherds. It means we need to show respect in the way we treat our shepherds. Even if we disagree, they are worthy of respect for their work in the kingdom and in the local congregation.
 - C. **I Timothy 5:17** says elders who rule well are worthy of double honor. We need to honor our elders for their good rule even when we disagree with them about something. Being a good elder doesn't mean agreeing with the sheep all the time.

Conclusion:

Sometimes I fear we appoint men as shepherds simply because we know we're supposed to without considering what that means about the new relationship we have with those men. These are the things we are saying when we select men as elders or come into a congregation with elders and agree to be members. If we're not able to say these things about our shepherds we need to change and grow, humbling ourselves and submitting to the shepherds the Holy Spirit has established over us.