

Spiritual Considerations...

Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.



Dave Phillips, editor

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Feeding the Sheep

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“So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord: You know that I love You.” He said to him “Tend my lambs.”

He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.”

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

(John 21:15-17, NASV)

This passage has always been a challenge for serious Bible students who want to determine with accuracy the nature of the conversation. Was Jesus referring to the fish, the other disciples, or the fishing equipment when he asked Simon if he loved Jesus more than these? Did Jesus really mean to make a distinction between the questions when he used two distinct Greek words for “love?” is there a lesson to be learned from the fact that Jesus said “tend my lambs,” then “shepherd my sheep,” and finally “tend my sheep.” These questions provide enough grist to keep us constantly wrestling with the text.

But one inescapable conclusion that cannot be explained away or conveniently avoided is the responsibility that Christian leaders have to feed the sheep. Once it was determined that Peter loved the Lord, the responsibility to care for the sheep was present. The picture of a shepherd is highly instructive. Though not a shepherd, I am reminded of Jesus’ own instruction in John 10, explaining that the sheep know the shepherd and respond to the voice of the one who cares for them.

The shepherd has the responsibility to know the sheep and provide food and protection for them. But how does he do it? Charles Edward Jefferson gave some advice to preachers and teachers in 1901. He said:

A minister of the gospel is not a sheep-driver, but a sheep-feeder. The former inevitably gets himself into trouble, especially if he manifest his driving propensities the first week. For a stranger to come into a ‘church’ and proceed forthwith to tell his hearers what he expects them to do borders closely on the impertinent. Why first of all feed the sheep? To feed sheep does not smack of presumption nor does it stir up opposition. Sheep like to be fed. They never resist. When repeatedly fed by the same shepherd they will follow him whithersoever he leads them. He can shear them again and again, and weave their wool into all sorts of lovely patterns for the glory of God, but when the new minister attempts to shear a flock of strange sheep the first day before noon he usually precipitates a furious scrimmage which is likely to leave the shepherd discomfited and out of breath. Many a man has complained bitterly of the foolishness and stubbornness of his sheep, who would have had no trouble had he only placed the feeding before the shearing. No sentence more momentous for

'preachers' lies between the lids of the Bible than the little sentence which too many of the successors of the Apostle have in every age overlooked. "Feed my sheep."

Peter serves as an excellent example of one who learned the lesson of leadership. Having served as an elder (1 Peter 5:1), preacher (Acts 2), and teacher (Acts 10), Peter knew what it meant to feed the flock. He wasn't perfect (Gal. 2:11), but he was faithful. He proved his love for the Lord by his service to the people.

Feeding sheep is not to be an easy task. Paul told Timothy that it would require great patience (2 Tim. 4:2). The motivating factor for feeding the sheep is our love for the Lord.

Family Rule

John Gipson, Little Rock, AR

The Church is special. When we meet together it is not just a gathering of acquaintances or friends, but a family reunion. I say family because we are all "members of the household of God," It is a relationship into which we have been born. We are "children of God."

With this in mind, let us hear the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, "But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, and indeed you do love all the brethren throughout Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more..."

When I was growing up, we had some family rules. Everybody ate together at the same table, and no one could leave until everyone was finished. You did the chores assigned to you, or wished that you had. You never talked back to mother, etc.

Therefore, it does not surprise me to find that there are rules in God's family. One of the most prominent concerns love. In the words of Jesus, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, but "to do so more and more."

There's much wrapped up in that little word love. It means that we will be patient with one another when opportunities arise for agitation. It demands kindness and thoughtfulness from us instead of malevolence. It forever banishes arrogant and rude behavior toward one another. It keeps us from insisting on having our own way. It eliminates the twin curses of irritability and resentment. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do, but always rejoices in the right. Come to think of it, love isn't such a little word at all when viewed in the context of 1 Corinthians 13.

Brethren, let's love one another, and do so "more and more." It's a family rule!

God

In all thine actions think that God sees thee,
and in all His actions labor to see Him.
That will make thee fear Him,
and this will move thee to love Him.
The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge,
and the knowledge of God is the perfection of love.

Francis Quarles