

# Pastors

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The modern “church” relies heavily on the work of a paid, professional man who is most often given the title “pastor.” Quite often, however, this title is nothing but a cover-up, where the man is wrongfully exalted into a position of clergy, a position of Nicolaitan (Greek – ruling over the people – Rev. 2:6, 15) and abusive authority. There are four aspects of the role of a pastor that we should look at which will point out where the “church” has turned aside from the pure way of following the Lord Jesus Christ.

## The Abuses

When it comes to analyzing the role that men claiming to be pastors have played, we must first recognize that there are only two types of “pastors” in the “church”: wheat and tares (see Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43) There are those – and I believe this is likely to be the larger portion of the group of men – that are truly seeking to serve God’s people but, because of their own religious, denominational and traditional indoctrination, are unable to see that the position they have taken is the very thing that does the most to prevent the people they try to serve from ever growing into spiritual maturity. Of these men, we can only pray that God reveals to them the error of their ways and that they will step down from this man-made position and seek to manifest whatever giftings God has truly given them outside the context of “church.”

But then there are those “pastors” who, through gross neglect of the need to practice what is preached from their own pulpits, have come under such spiritual bondage and oppression that they bear no spiritual resemblance anymore to a son of the kingdom of God. These “pastors” are divisive despots who surround themselves with yes-men and spiritual groupies who will use virtually any means of political power to silence or discredit anyone who speaks against their “powerful ministry.” Of these men, we can only pray that God will be merciful and grant them the grace to repent before they die or before the angels are loosed to remove the tares and take them away to be burned. And in the meantime, we will note them as the most divisive of men and we will carefully avoid them. (Rom. 16:17-18)

Within the context of “church,” there is no other category of “pastor.” Indeed, there cannot be any other. As we will see when we examine what a pastor really is in the New Testament, the true role of pastor (Greek – poimen [4166], shepherd) is not easily practiced in a “church.” Those true shepherds who quietly go about their work of loving and caring for the sheep often run afoul of the “pastor”-despot and have to leave that “church,” go find another one and start their work up all over again only to run into the same treatment from the hands of yet another “pastor”-despot.

Because God has been allowing the tares and the wheat to grow to maturity simultaneously (Mt. 13:30), the revelation about the “church” and the destructiveness of its man-made positions has been withheld. But as we near the time when the angels are to be loosed to separate the tares from the wheat before the harvest (Mt. 13:41), God is graciously allowing us to see things for what they really are. Those who hunger for only truth and righteousness will forsake all man-made traditions and practices. Those who take pleasure in deceptions and unrighteousness will be deceived and will perish. (2 Ths. 2:11-12)

This calling of “church” “pastors” what they really are – either deceived or deceitful – stands in stark contrast to the “church’s” worldly doctrines and practices of tolerance. It would be impossible to count the number of times this author has been accused of being “harsh,”

“unloving,” “hurt,” and/or “bitter” simply because I refuse to compromise the truth as it is presented in the Scriptures. And those who make such accusations fail to recognize that even making such an accusation is an old, old ploy, tailor-made to keep the accuser from having to come face to face with the truth.

The real difference is in the spirit. If any person – whether a leader or not – has truly been born again, they have the life and spirit of Christ within them. It is when a person – especially some supposed spiritual leader – reacts with slander, gossip, anger, arrogance and/or rage to the truth about his “church’s” malpractice of Christianity, that one has to wonder which spirit really resides in him. Perhaps he is only possessed of a religious, “church” spirit and is in great need of deliverance – or perhaps he truly is a son of Satan (Mt. 13:38; 1 Jn. 3:10) whose only purpose is to spread confusion and spiritual disease among the people of God. I am not prepared to judge that fine of a line – I am only prepared to recognize the fruit that comes from the life. If the man – no matter what title he takes to himself or others give to him – if he ostracizes and rejects other believers simply because they disagree with him or his denomination’s view, that man is divisive and is to be avoided like the plague that he is. (Rom. 16:17-18) But while I am not prepared to judge such a man’s eternal salvation – a matter held in the secret counsels of the heart of God and yet to be worked out over time – I am most prepared to denounce such a one as being completely unfit for any and all positions of leadership in the body of Christ.

Until we, as the body of Christ, learn to discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error, there will be many welcome places for all the divisive, power-hungry Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9-10) who hide behind the title “pastor.”

### **Religion**

There are chiefly two reasons the “church” has such need of a “pastor.” First, when a man is paid to do the work of studying the Scriptures and presenting the truth to a studiously passive audience, no one in the audience ever needs to press into God’s presence to find out the truth for himself. This is more of an integral part of human nature than you might first suppose.

The first instance we see of sinful man attempting to hide from God is Adam. After having rebelled against God’s command not to eat of the tree of moral knowledge, Adam tried to hide from God. He was brought to account, however, and the result was the curse of sin and death that came upon all mankind. (Gen. 3:6-10)

We see a similar attempt to hide from God in the Israelites. God came down upon Mt. Sinai and invited the whole nation of Israel to join Him. But because the fire and smoke on the mountain unnerved the Israelites, they sent Moses up to meet with God instead. The result was the Levitical priesthood which stood between the people of Israel and the God of Israel. (Ex. 20:18-21)

We see a similar attempt to avoid God in Peter. When he saw the miraculous power of Jesus and realized that He was God in human flesh, Peter fell down on his face and cried out for Jesus to get away from him because he was a wicked man. Fortunately for Peter (and for all of us), Jesus knew that He would overcome the barrier of wickedness that Adam had erected between himself and God. Jesus insisted on remaining near to Peter and the result was that the presence of God in Peter’s life worked profound differences in a man who was inclined to rash folly and racial bigotry. (Lk. 5:1-11; also see Gal. 2:11-13; Acts 10:28)

Religion will do just about anything to allow its adherents to avoid coming into the direct presence of God. It will manufacture fig leaves for us to hide behind. It will seek a Moses to go

up the mountain of God in our place. It will even cause us to recognize our own wickedness and teach us to use that as an excuse to push away God. But when God confronts us in our religious state, our fig leaves will prove inadequate, what Moses has to say will be insufficient and our own wickedness will not be strong enough to keep Christ from shining through if we will but submit to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The “pastor” who promotes only moral precepts – the do’s and don’t’s of “Christianity” – is only manufacturing fig leaves. The “pastor” who insists – either by doctrine or by practice – that he is the main one who hears God for the whole congregation, is only another Moses stepping into the obsolete role of Levitical priest. The “pastor” who recognizes his own wicked state and the wickedness of his “church” but yet refuses to allow Christ to change him is only another recalcitrant fisherman. None of these are qualified to be considered leaders in the body of Christ.

### **The Scriptures**

The first thing we need to realize is that the English word “pastor” appears only once in the New Testament – and that was inserted by the King James translators in 1611, apparently as a way to justify the position called “pastor” in the Anglican sect. The Greek word that is translated “pastor” is “poimen” [4166] and it appears 18 times in the New Testament. 17 of those times it is translated “shepherd” and this is the real meaning of the word: one who watches over sheep.

Actually, the Scriptures have very little to say about shepherds. But the little it says ought to speak volumes to us. And what it does not say should speak even more loudly against our modern “church” traditions. Here are the Scriptures that contain the word “poimen.”

- Mt. 9:36 – the people were scattered as sheep without a shepherd
- Mt. 25:32 – Jesus will divide the peoples as a shepherd divides sheep from the goats
- Mt. 26:31 – Jesus fulfills an Old Testament prophecy about the shepherd being stricken and the sheep scattered
- Mk. 6:34 – the people were as sheep having no shepherd
- Mk. 14:27 – Jesus fulfills an Old Testament prophecy about the shepherd being stricken and the sheep scattered
- Lk. 2:8, 15, 18, 20 – four references to the shepherds who came to visit baby Jesus
- Jn. 10:2, 11-12, 14, 16 – characteristics of good shepherds and the Good Shepherd
- Eph. 4:11 – Jesus gave shepherds to equip, edify and mature the saints
- Heb. 13:20 – Jesus is the great shepherd of the sheep

- 1 Pet. 2:25 – Jesus is the Shepherd (poimen [4166]) and Overseer (episkopos [1985]) of our souls

That’s all the Scriptures have to say about shepherds. We will examine a little more in depth the passage from John which details some characteristics of good shepherds. But let’s take a moment to notice what is missing from this list of Scriptures about shepherds.

- No one in the New Testament (except Jesus) is ever said to be a pastor or shepherd of believers.
- No pastor or shepherd is ever connected with overseeing an ekklesia; only overseers (“episkopos”) and elders (“presbuteros”) are given that responsibility.
- No pastor or shepherd is ever seen speaking publicly, let alone giving a sermon; only apostles and evangelists are seen speaking anything resembling a sermon.
- No pastor or shepherd has anything resembling dictatorial powers – in fact, “lording it over” anyone is forbidden by Jesus. (Mt. 20:25-26; Mk.10:42-43)
- No pastor or shepherd gathers followers to himself – in fact, Paul denounces following after men as being “carnal,” a trait also described as being at enmity with God (1 Cor. 3:1-4; Rom. 8:7)
- There are no list of character/spiritual qualifications for shepherds (“poimen”) but there are for overseers (“episkopos”) and deacons (“diakonos”). (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9)

These represent some of the more common traits and tactics of modern “pastors” – and there is absolutely no Scriptural basis for any of these.

There are those who attempt to make some Scriptural justification for the position of the “church pastor” but these succeed only in distorting the meanings of the Scriptures. Because they don’t understand the difference between a shepherd (poimen [4166]) and an overseer (episkopos [1985]), they make them out to be the same thing. “Shepherd” is one of the five giftings Jesus gives to His people to equip, edify and mature them. (Eph. 4:11-16) “Overseer” is an elder who is mature and who has been set in place to watch over the local believers and is a term dependent upon maturity and of being spiritually qualified. (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9) While an overseer indeed functions pastorally, not every shepherd is an overseer. A shepherd, because it is only a gifting and like any other gifting, can be of any age or “level” of maturity. A young shepherd, that is, one who is indeed called to be a shepherd but who is still young in his walk with the Lord, is not given the same responsibilities as is a shepherd who is older and more mature in his walk.

Those who equate “poimen” and “episkopos” have to ignore or remove what Peter said about Jesus being the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. (1 Pet. 2:25) If “shepherd” and

“overseer” are precisely, exactly and only the same thing, then Peter is making a nonsensical statement along the lines of “I have an apple and an apple in my lunch box.” But because “shepherd” and overseer” are not precisely, exactly and only the same thing, Peter is making both a logical statement (“I have an apple and an orange in my lunch box.”) and a profound statement. (“Jesus cares for my soul as a shepherd cares for his sheep and He watches over my soul as one who has great wisdom and experience in doing so.”)

There is indeed much confusion in the body of Christ today about the role of the giftings and callings of the leaders. The easiest way to see what the body of Christ is to look like is to see it as Paul recognized the Philippian ekklesia. Paul addressed his letter “To all the saints (Greek – “hagios” [40]) in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops (Greek – “episkopos” [1985]) and deacons (Greek – “diakonos” [1249])” (Phlp.1:1) There are three categories given – and each one represents a different level of maturity in addition to recognizing the leadership roles. The saints (“hagios”) are all the people of Christ no matter what age or level of spiritual maturity that are not gifted with leadership giftings or responsibilities. The deacons (“diakonos”) are those who are recognized as being gifted in one area or another and who have the heart to serve. The word is most often translated “minister” and it refers simply to one who serves or ministers to some need. The bishops (“episkopos”) were those who were mature in the faith and to whom had been committed the responsibility to watch over the local saints.

These are the only categories of spiritual maturity and leadership to which one can belong in the body of Christ. Confusion is introduced when one takes the fivefold ministry of the Holy Spirit through men – apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers, the giftings of men to the body – and converts these into a hierarchy of leadership. These giftings, while they are the giftings given to leaders in the body of Christ, are not limited only to leaders. Any and all of the saints are to be apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and instructive – this is a sign of their spiritual maturity. (see Eph. 4:13-16) But only those saints who are gifted by the Holy Spirit, who have a heart to serve, who are recognized by the local body as being qualified and willing to serve are to be recognized as deacons or ministers. (see Acts 6:2-3) And only those saints who are gifted by the Holy Spirit, who have a heart to serve and who are mature in their service to God and to the body are to be recognized and appointed by the apostles to watch over the local body. (see 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9; Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5) Anything else is contrary to the New Testament pattern of ekklesia. And if it’s contrary to the New Testament pattern, then it is only a tradition of men that is to be discarded so that the body of Christ may walk fully in spirit and truth with its Head, Christ Jesus.

### **Good Shepherds**

When Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd, He also gave us some descriptions by which we can recognize good shepherds. John records Jesus’ words – and it is interesting to note that this very familiar passage was spoken to some Pharisees who were with Jesus who questioned whether they themselves were also as blind as the man Jesus had just healed. John wrote:

And Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.”

Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, “Are we blind also?”

Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.” (Jn. 9:39-10:16; 10:26-30)

Let’s list the characteristics of good shepherds and let the Scriptures speak for themselves:

- a good shepherd has entered the sheepfold through Christ and through Christ alone
- the doorkeeper opens the door for a good shepherd (analogous of the work of both the Savior and the Holy Spirit)
- the sheep hear the voice of Jesus in the voice of a good shepherd
- a good shepherd calls his own sheep by name (so much for the notion that one man could be a shepherd to hundreds or thousands of people)
- a good shepherd leads the sheep out (a reference to the close proximity of the shepherd’s walk to the walks of the sheep)
- when a good shepherd brings out his own sheep, he goes before them and the sheep follow him (another reference to the close proximity of the shepherd’s walk to the walks of the sheep)

- the sheep know the voice of a good shepherd and will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (This is why it is important that young sheep learn to hear Jesus' voice first. Otherwise, whomever they believe to be their shepherd will be the voice they listen to – whether he is a good shepherd or merely a hireling.)

- a good shepherd leads the sheep in and out and to good pasture
- a good shepherd brings life and brings it abundantly
- a good shepherd gives his life for the sheep
- a good shepherd cares for the sheep
- a good shepherd recognizes that there will be only one flock and only one Shepherd
- a good shepherd pushes and leads the sheep toward believing and obeying the Shepherd
- a good shepherd watches to be sure the sheep are neither snatched away nor wander off

If any man claims to be a shepherd and does not do these things, he is a liar and a thief, a mere hireling who will desert and abandon the sheep in the time of their greatest need.

Strong's *Greek Dictionary* reports:

The tasks of a Near Eastern shepherd were:

- to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep
- to defend the sheep from attackers
- to heal the wounded and sick sheep
- to find and save lost or trapped sheep
- to love them, sharing their lives and so earning their trust.

We have lost much understanding of the role of a shepherd because of our advances in technology which have removed us from the close proximity to the rural life of sheep and shepherds. Philip Keller, a sheep rancher for many years, has written many books about the analogy of sheep and shepherds as it relates to the Christian life. One example that has always stuck out in my mind was the remedy for a wayward sheep. After a young sheep began to demonstrate a tendency to wander away from its mother and away from the flock, the shepherd, with just the right amount of force, would purposefully take up his rod and lovingly break the young lamb's leg. Then, as the lamb went through the process of healing, the shepherd would take great care of that lamb, carrying it around his neck, spending much time with it and showering it with attention and affection. But once the lamb was healed, if it still demonstrated the tendency to wander off, the lamb was quickly slaughtered so that it would not teach the other sheep to wander off as well.

In our modern misconceptions of "pastors," we recoil at this. We cannot conceive of our spiritual leaders loving us in this way. Yet that is one role of the true shepherd who watches over our spiritual growth. Anyone who will not stand up and confront wickedness and religiosity in all its manifestations and forms is not a mature shepherd and such a one will prove to be only of limited benefit to your walk in Christ.

## Vendetta

There are those who imagine that this author is on some personal vendetta against the “church” and against “pastors” in particular. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am simply opposed to any doctrine or practice which is not to be found in Scripture. Further, I am especially opposed to all doctrines and practices which are based upon lies of Satan and/or empty, Christ-less traditions of men. These are the things which are crippling and killing the sheep of my Lord who are also my brothers and sisters in Christ. The “church” and the “pastors” are responsible for much damage inflicted upon the sheep, the people of Christ, and their judgment is not sleeping but is only reserved for the proper time.

Should any “pastor” read this, my prayer is that you would reconsider how the traditions of men and the Satanic distortions of Scripture have perverted the straight ways of the Lord in your life. If you are a genuine man of God, then let your hunger for truth and righteousness rise up in you. Step away from the institution which siphons away your faith in God. Release the people from the bondage you have kept them under. Find out from God what your true giftings are – you may not even be a shepherd in His eyes! But don’t continue to think that you can remain within the institutional framework and raise the sheep to spiritual maturity. These two are opposed to one another – it will never work – and it is the very reason only a tiny fraction of the people receive anything of Christ.

But if you are a “pastor” who is truly only a tare among the wheat, a son of the devil, then know that you are a stiff-necked, rebellious son of disobedience who will soon be removed by the angels and you will be burned in an everlasting fire for all the damage you have done to the flock of Christ. The anger of the Shepherd burns against you because you are a mere hireling who has robbed, cheated and killed His cherished lambs. You always resist the work of the Holy Spirit of God and you will not receive the truth – instead you will persecute, ridicule and slander any and all who speak the truth. But even you have the opportunity to repent and be changed by the love of the Savior – *if, I repeat, if*, today, you will hear His voice and not harden your heart in rebellion. But if you will not repent today, you increase the likelihood that you will not be able to repent at any time in the future – and you increase the likelihood of spending your eternity in the lake of fire that is reserved for the devil and his messengers. The choice is yours.

For those people who would belong to Christ, it is time to stop playing with the deceptions of “church” and take on the full responsibilities of being the ekklesia, the called-out people of Christ. Forsake the notions of clergy and laity – these are only doctrines of demons. Forsake the institution which robs you of spiritual life – this is only a tradition of men. Embrace all those who have been given new spiritual life from God as what they truly are – your brothers and sisters in Christ. Recognize the leaders whom *God* has raised up – they are not hard to identify if you have any real spiritual discernment and any real knowledge of what the Scriptures really say.

God is calling His people away from spiritual adultery and fornication with the religious whore, the spirit of Babylon which manifests itself in all religions, especially “Christianity” and “churchianity.” Paul wrote, “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1)



Do not be deceived by men bearing titles and speaking wonderful things – look for the people of God who are genuinely living the whole of their lives as acts of worship to God in spirit and truth. Those who are destined to perish will fall away by gathering to themselves many teachers who speak boastful, proud and flattering things because the people who will pay to be so spoken to will not endure the genuine truth of Christ and His word. (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Ths. 2:3, 9-12; Rom. 16:18)

The one who will speak only Christ's truth to you – no matter how much it hurts you or makes you uncomfortable or causes you to be hated by men – that one is your true friend because he or she is leading you to eternal and abundant life. And it is still true that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18)

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