

The Office of Bishop or Overseer, Understood By the Metaphor of a Shepherd and a Flock of Sheep

INTRODUCTION

Last time, we considered together how the passage we have here, 1 Timothy 3, helps us, God's church, know how to have bishops or pastors or elders who are not like bad shepherds, but are like good shepherds. We are to accept that the instructions given here by our Lord's apostle are the true, faithful, reliable word on the subject of how the church can have good bishops rather than bad ones.

Today we continue in that vein, working to understand the office of bishop or position of overseer in the church.

All around us, people seem to think of churches and their bishops in various ways.

1. people see a church as a business competing with others for customers, with the bishops as CEO
2. people see a church as a club they might join based on mutual interests, with the overseers as club president
3. people see a church as a theater where entertaining shows are put on
4. people see a church as a public facility like a park or swimming pool that they make use of when they feel the need for it
5. people see a church as a fitness center or recreation center, with the bishops as trainers or activity directors

I think that in the past I have had some of those thoughts; maybe you have, too.

But our Lord Jesus, by His apostles Peter and Paul, has explained to us the office of bishop or the position of overseer in the church by the metaphor of a flock of sheep with shepherds. Let's delight ourselves in reading some of what the Bible says about that today, better to understand how our Lord Jesus cares for us by men in the office of bishop or position of overseer.

TEXT

1 Timothy 3:1

BODY

- I. Our Lord's Apostles Themselves Have Taught Us That The Office of Bishop Or Overseer Is to Be Understood By the Metaphor of a Shepherd Caring for a Flock of Sheep
 - A. Paul - Acts 20:28
 1. note also here that "elders" is used to describe the same men in the same office
 - B. Peter - 1 Peter 5:2
 1. note also here that "elders" is used to describe the same men in the same office

- II. Ultimately, Jesus Christ Is the Shepherd
 - A. He is the One Shepherd John 10:16
 1. in the sense that Jesus is the Shepherd, He is the one, the only, the unique Shepherd
 2. He has laid down His life for the sheep
 3. He has taken His life back up again
 - B. He is the Good Shepherd - John 10:11
 1. He is good Himself
 2. His care for the sheep is good
 3. the effects of His care for the sheep are all good
 - C. He is the Great Shepherd - Hebrews 13:20
 - D. Among all men who are properly called shepherds of God's people, He is chief - 1 Peter 5:4
 - E. What goes with His being the Shepherd is being the Bishop or Overseer, also - 1 Peter 2:25

III. We, the Church, Are Christ's Sheep

A. We were sheep who had gone astray

1. David admitted this of himself - Psalm 119:176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.
2. Isaiah wrote that this is true of every one of us, an apt metaphor for our transgressions against God's law - Isaiah 53:6a All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...
 - a) take this to heart: all we...every one

B. In one sense, we were led astray by bad shepherds

1. Jeremiah 50:6a My people have been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray...
2. King Jeroboam set up idols for Israel to worship
3. men in the office of bishop have similarly set up many idols for people to worship

C. In another sense, we had no shepherd

1. Matthew 9:35-36 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (36) But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

D. We now, who trust in Jesus Christ, are sheep gathered into one flock, with Christ as our Shepherd

1. 1 Peter 2:24-25 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (25) For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.
2. Our going astray was our sins, our transgression, our iniquity;
3. when Jesus Christ came and died for our sins, He put those things to death for us, that we can be counted righteous through faith in Him, and so we can now live in righteousness;
4. so, He as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, as caused us who had gone astray to return to Him, the Shepherd of our souls

E. When speaking of Jesus Christ as the one Shepherd, and all believers in Christ as one flock, the metaphor represents something mystical

1. our Lord Jesus said that when He had called His sheep, both Jew and Gentile, they would all be one flock or one fold
2. you can't see Christ Jesus shepherding His one flock
3. you can't see all believers being together as one flock

- IV. During This Life, in This Present World, Those Men in the Office of Bishop, the Position of Overseer, Are the Churches' Shepherds
- A. It can seem strange to talk about mere men being the church's shepherds when Jesus Christ the Son of God is the church's one Shepherd; but consider how comfortable we are with other ways God deals with us like that
 - 1. e.g. Father - father
 - B. Unlike the sense in which the Lord Jesus is the shepherd of one flock, men in the office of bishop are shepherds of one local church
 - 1. we do not believe in a hierarchical system of bishops over several churches
 - 2. we do not believe in a bishop of a church larger than what can actually assemble
 - a) e.g. no "Church of England"
 - b) this is part of the history of why we have the word "church" in our English bibles
 - (1) the Puritans in the early 1600s were ready to translate the word "church" as "congregation"
 - (2) but King James and his bishops specifically prohibited that, as it would undermine the Church of England's episcopal system, since clearly the whole national system of religion in the country could not rightly be called a "congregation," since it never congregated
 - C. When speaking of men in the office of bishop as shepherds, and each church as a flock, the metaphor represents something that is not mystical
 - 1. you can see the men in the office of bishop, the position of overseer
 - 2. you can see the believers in each church together
 - D. Your dear Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, cares for you His sheep by these men in the office of Bishop
 - 1. John 21:14-17 when the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead told Peter to care for His sheep
 - 2. 1 Peter 5:1-4 Peter instructed those men who are elders, who are in the office of bishop, to care for the flock

CONCLUSION

Our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted for us, His church, a simple system of having the church appoint men to the office of Bishop, or the position of Overseer, to serve as shepherds on His behalf for His flock. A big part of knowing how we ought to conduct ourselves in His church is understanding His simple system, and making good use of it to make sure we use that office as He instituted it, especially that we have men in that office who will be like good shepherds for His flock.

Thad - Call to Worship - Psalm 95:6-7a

~~Dillon~~ Jeff - Scripture Reading - John 10:1-18

Chris - Congregational Prayer

Benediction - John 10:27-28

Anna - Prelude (please pick something)

Anna - Trinity 218 (First Tune) "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

Rita - Trinity 461 "From Depths of Woe"

~~Allison~~ Anna - Trinity 387 "I Love to Tell the Story"