Message Six

Shepherding according to God

Scripture Reading: John 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:2; 2:25; Eph. 4:12-16

I. To shepherd is to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock—John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28:

A. Shepherding refers to caring for all the needs of the sheep.

B. All the sheep need to be well provided for and well tended to.

II. Shepherding depends on teaching; if we cannot teach, we cannot shepherd—Matt. 28:19-20; 9:35-36:

A. Shepherding and teaching go together—Eph. 4:11.

B. Our shepherding should always be with teaching, and our teaching should always be with shepherding—Acts 2:42; 20:28; Col. 1:28.

III. We all need to know and experience Christ as the Shepherd of our souls—1 Pet. 2:25:

A. As the Shepherd of our souls, Christ oversees our inward condition, caring for the situation of our inner being:

1. Christ's organic shepherding primarily takes care of our soul—Psa. 23:3.
2. He shepherds us by caring for the welfare of our soul and by exercising oversight over the condition of our inner being—cf. Heb. 13:17.
3. This kind of shepherding is an inward, intrinsic, organic comforting—2 Cor. 1:3-4.

B. Because our soul is very complicated, we need Christ, who is the life-giving Spirit in our spirit, to shepherd us in our soul, to take care of our mind, emotion, and will and all our problems, needs, and wounds—John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 6:17.

IV. Those who shepherd the flock of God should shepherd according to God—1 Pet. 5:2; Phil. 1:21a:

A. To shepherd according to God is to shepherd according to God's nature, desire, way, and glory, not according to our preference, interest, purpose, and disposition—2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 1:5, 9; 3:21; John 14:6.

B. *According to God* in 1 Peter 5:2 means that we live God; only those who live God can shepherd according to God.

C. In order to shepherd according to God, we need to become God in life, nature, expression, and function but not in the Godhead—Col. 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:4:

1. We need to be filled to the brim with the divine life, enjoying the Triune God as the fountain, the spring, and the river to become the totality of the divine life, even to become the divine life itself—John 4:14; Col. 3:4.

D. If we would shepherd according to God, we need to become one with God—John 14:20; 1 Cor. 6:17:

1. When we are one with God, we become God in life and nature and are God in our shepherding of others—1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Pet. 5:2.

V. The shepherding that builds up the Body of Christ is mutual shepherding—1 Cor. 12:23-26:

A. We are both sheep and shepherds, shepherding and being shepherded in mutuality.

Fellowship Questions

- What do you know and what have you experienced of Christ as the Shepherd of your soul?
- Consider an experience to share of being shepherded by another member of the Body or shepherding someone. What was the context, way, and outcome of that shepherding?
- How is the high peak of the divine revelation—God becoming man to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead—related to shepherding according to God?

Reading

CHRIST OUR SHEPHERD

In 1 Peter 2:25 Peter goes on to say, "For you were like sheep being led astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Christ was our Redeemer in His death on the tree. Now He is our soul's Shepherd and Overseer in the resurrection life within us. Therefore, He is able to guide us and supply us with life that we may follow in His steps according to the model of His suffering (v. 21). According to verse 25, Christ is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Our soul is our inner being, our real person. Our Lord, as the Shepherd and Overseer of our soul, shepherds us by caring for the welfare of our inner being and by exercising His oversight over the condition of our real person.

Our problem was that we were like sheep being led astray. But now we have returned, turned back, to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. We should not think that in verse 25 Peter uses soul as a synonym of spirit. This is definitely not the case. A shepherd takes care of the physical needs of his flock, and Christ our Shepherd takes care of the needs of our soul. [191] He is not the Shepherd of our body; He is the Shepherd of our soul, our inner being. We all have a spirit, and the spirit is our inward organ. But our being is a soul. Therefore, Christ mainly shepherds us by taking care of our soul. He takes care of our mind, emotion, and will.

We may think that our problems are with the body. No doubt, the body does give us many problems. Nevertheless, our real problem is in our soul. Our mind, emotion, and will all have problems. Unbelievers are wanderers in the soul, and they do not have a shepherd to take care of them. But our situation is different in that we have a Shepherd who takes care of our soul. Not only do we have the Lord's life within us, but we also have Him as our Shepherd. He is now shepherding us in our soul.

I would ask you to consider this matter of the Lord's shepherding according to your experience. Do you experience the Lord's comfort and sense His comfort in your spirit or in your soul? In other words, where is the Lord's comfort, in our spirit or in our soul? If you say that His comfort is in the spirit, your answer is not according to the Bible. Before you came into the Lord's recovery, you may not have known that you had a human spirit. But since you have been in the church life, you have seen the revelation concerning the human spirit. But this revelation may have now become to you a new kind of tradition. To say that Christ's comfort is in our spirit is to speak according to a new tradition concerning the spirit. Many times we speak of turning to the spirit, perhaps expecting that when we turn to the spirit, everything will be all right. Actually, even after we turn to the spirit, many things may not be all right. From experience Peter knew to say that Christ is the Shepherd of our

souls. Therefore, Peter does not tell us in verse 25 that Christ is the Shepherd of our spirit or of our body; He clearly says that He is the Shepherd of our souls.

This Epistle was written to Jewish Christians who were suffering much persecution. Apparently, persecution is related to our body outwardly. Actually, persecution is aimed at the soul. Because it is our soul that suffers, it is our soul that needs the Lord's shepherding. It is not our body that needs this kind of [192] care, nor is it mainly our spirit. It is our soul—our mind, our emotion, and our will—that needs the Lord as the Shepherd.

In our experience sometimes we just do not know what to think about. We do not know where to direct our thoughts. This is an indication that our mind needs the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd. I can testify that many times in this kind of situation the Lord Jesus has been a Shepherd to me. As a result of His shepherding, our mind is directed and set in the right way.

Our emotion, being complicated, is easily upset. This is especially true of the sisters' emotion. Therefore, we need the Lord Jesus to shepherd us in our emotion. His shepherding comforts our emotion.

Our will also needs the Lord's shepherding. As human beings, we often find it difficult to make the right decision. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to make a decision. Unbelievers have no one to lead them and guide them in making decisions. But we have a Shepherd to lead us and guide us. The Lord's leading and guiding are primarily related to our will. As the living Shepherd, the Lord continually directs our will. I cannot tell you how many times I have experienced this. The Lord is truly the Shepherd of our soul. He directs our mind, comforts our emotion, and leads and guides our will.
(*Life-study of First Peter, Message 21*)

OUR NEED FOR GENUINE SHEPHERDING

For many years in the Lord's recovery our defect has been the shortage of shepherding. Strictly speaking, according to what the Lord has shown us, we have had no real shepherding. We are short of fruit because we do not have the adequate shepherding, and we have troubles because of the shortage of shepherding. Now we realize why the Gospel of John has chapter 21. After giving a full record of Christ, John added an appendix to stress nothing other than shepherding (vv. 15-17). We need to go in order to shepherd others. This will revolutionize our being, our logic, and our way of thinking. It will change us.
(*Fellowship before the Meetings of the Full-time Training in the Fall of 1996, CWWL, 1994-1997, Vol. 5*)

SHEPHERDING THE SAINTS AS THE FLOCK OF GOD ACCORDING TO GOD, THAT IS, ACCORDING TO GOD'S NATURE, DESIRE, WAY, AND GLORY

Through their experience of the dispensing of the divine Trinity, the believers may also shepherd the saints as the flock of God according to God, that is, according to God's nature, desire, way, and glory. In Acts 20:28 Paul says to the elders in Ephesus, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." The main responsibility of the elders as overseers is not to rule over the

flock but to shepherd the flock, to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock, the church of God. Shepherding the flock of God requires suffering for the Body of Christ as Christ did (Col. 1:24). This kind of shepherding with suffering will be rewarded with the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).

First Peter 5:2a says, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by way of compulsion, but willingly, according to God." To shepherd according to God means according to God's nature, desire, way, and glory, not according to man's preference, interest, and purpose. The elders should not shepherd the flock according to their opinion, concepts, or likes or dislikes. Instead, they should shepherd according to God's choice, desire, intention, and preference. The elders must shepherd the saints as the flock of God altogether according to God's thought, feeling, will, and choice. They must shepherd according to God's likes and dislikes.
(*The Conclusion of the New Testament: The Believers, Volume 2, Message 169*)

VISITATION

In the church, meetings are of primary importance, followed by visitation. The word visitation implies shepherding and teaching. To shepherd is to give food, and to teach is to impart the truth. The gifts to the Body include shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11). We cannot expect every saint to function in this way, but we should at least expect every responsible saint to do the work of shepherding and teaching. This can be likened to the older siblings in a family being able to prepare food for their younger siblings or to help them with their homework.

A church that lacks proper shepherding and teaching cannot be built up. Degraded and deformed Christianity does not care for shepherding and teaching. Catholics rely on priests, and Protestants rely on pastors, but in the Lord's churches every member should function to supply their fellow members. The responsible saints are more experienced and have learned more lessons before the Lord. Hence, they should endeavor to supply the younger saints in the meetings and in private visitations. Such visitation is shepherding and teaching.

The responsible ones should serve mainly by leading the meetings and visiting the saints. The responsible ones should not run the meetings. They should lead the meetings so that the meetings are living and strong. The responsible ones should also have thorough coordination concerning care for the saints. All the saints—whether they are weak, backsliding, dormant, sick, unemployed, have financial needs, family troubles, marital problems, or have suffered the loss of a family member—should receive shepherding and care. The responsible ones must have a clear understanding of the human and spiritual needs of every saint in order to provide proper leading and help.

Visiting the saints and thorough fellowship are not merely an ideal; they are practical. If we can care for every brother and sister, there will be many opportunities for them to be active and serve both in the meetings and individually. According to his growth, a brother can be given some responsibility to serve in visiting others. The purpose of our gospel activities is to bring in more new ones who can learn to take care of other believers. This is our family custom. Every saint should have a spiritual living and produce spiritual children. Then the church will gradually spread.
(*The Service for Building up the House of God, CWWL, 1954, Vol. 3*)