

The Shepherd's Responsibility

1 Thessalonians 5:12

52-24

It's our joy now to study together the Word of God. Open your Bible, if you will, to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. We begin to embark upon a study of what is the last major section of this wonderful letter from Paul to the Christians in Thessalonica. We're looking at a section that begins in verse 12 and runs all the way down to verse 22. It is really a long series of exhortations, commands. They have to do with practical life in the church. I've entitled this series and section, "Growing a Healthy Flock."

Now, if you've been with us in the past, you know that we've been in a rather prolonged study of the prior section which dealt with the second coming of Jesus Christ. From chapter 4, verse 13 all the way down to chapter 5, verse 11, that entire section has to do with the return of Christ, His return for the church which we call the Rapture, His return to judge the ungodly which is called the day of the Lord. And we are a church like the Thessalonian church that waits for His coming; that is looking for the return of Jesus Christ. In that sense we live in future hope. We are looking forward to what is coming. But at the same time, the anticipation of the second coming of Jesus Christ cannot make us indifferent to the present. Because we are a people with a great future, we cannot be a people indifferent to the present. And so transitioning right out of the great discussion of Rapture and day of the Lord, the Apostle Paul begins to talk about the practicality of how we live in the church today. In fact, verse 11 provides a bridge for his discussion.

You'll remember that after discussing the Rapture he said at the end of chapter 4, "Comfort one another with these words." And after discussing the judgment of the day of the Lord in chapter 5, verse 11 he said, "Encourage one another and build up one another just as you also are doing." In other words, don't let anybody be discouraged as they look at the future. You be encouraged and you be built up about your future. The question immediately comes then, how do we encourage one another? How do we build up one another? How do we respond to the great future hope we have? And that's the very thought that bridges him right in to verse 12. We live here and now in the way that God would want us to live while we wait for the unfolding of our great future glory.

And so this section will be instruction for life in the church; very practical, very basic, very straight forward, very direct. And the church needs a good, healthy dose of this kind of instruction, believe me. If there's anything that grieves my heart across America, it is the fact that we have so many unhealthy churches, so many churches that do not know the power of God, the presence of God, the peace of God, the joy of God; that do not experience all of the blessings of God that He pours out to those who are walking according to His will and moving ahead toward being like Jesus Christ. We have many, many unhealthy churches. It's a continual grief to me to talk to pastors who are so deeply burdened because they are in a church that demonstrates a lack of spiritual commitment. It also is a grief to me to hear from people who are in churches where their leadership is not committed to spiritual growth and development. This country is filled with busy churches and some big churches but many unhealthy churches. One rather cynical writer looking at the church said that the church

reminded him of Noah's ark, of which he said, "If it weren't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the stench inside."

That's a cynical view of the church. That's a jaded view of the church. And it's far from the reality of what the church should be and what the true church is. The church is the most blessed institution on the earth, the only one built by the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one He said He'd promise to bless, and the gates of hell would never be able to hold it in. Now, we're not saying the church doesn't have difficulty; it does. The reason the church has difficulty is because the church has people, and we're all fallen, and we're all sinful, and we're all imperfect, and we have weaknesses, and we face difficulties. Fallen and sinful people make up the church. Weak people make up the church. And in many ways we have to say the church is a hospital. It's not a place for perfect people. It's not a place for people who imagine they're perfect. It's a place for people who admit they're not and they want help. And it isn't until the church admits that that it begins to move in the right direction. Certainly the church has faults. You always hear people say, "Well, I don't want to join the church. There's too many hypocrites." To which the proper response is, "Well come on in, we've got room for more."

Sure, we have faults. The admission of that, the recognition of that is the basic stance from which you begin to grow, from which you begin to move in the right direction. We have to start with the confession of our failures and our weaknesses. So we acknowledge the church is going to have trouble. I've never seen a church that didn't. That's because people have problems and leaders have problems; relationships therefore are stretched and strained and made difficult. Then you can add to that the reality that Satan works hard against the church, and so do his supernatural agents, and so do his human agents. But still, the true church is far better than any other organization, association, or institution on the face of the earth, because it moves toward being like Jesus Christ, because it represents Him in the world, because its life is energized by the Holy Spirit, because it lives under the instruction of the Word of God, because it applies spiritual power mutually through fellowship and service among its members. It therefore is the greatest association, organization, institution in the face of the earth. But it is admittedly people in process. We're not where we ought to be but we're not where we were. We're moving in that direction.

Go back to chapter 4, verse 1 and be reminded of what Paul said there that really is a good summary of life in the church. Halfway down through the verse he says, "You ought to walk and please God." Then he says, "Just as you actually do walk that you may excel still more." Now there's a church in progress. You're doing well, in fact you're excelling, but I want you to excel more. You're walking and pleasing God but I want you to do it more. That's a summation of the process. And I think in so many, many ways – and I've said this on a number of occasions – that the church that we are in, Grace Community Church, is very much like the Thessalonian church. It is not completely without problems, but it is a healthy, whole church of quality people committed to walking to please God. Spiritual growth is taking place. We are in process. We're moving the right direction. And so as the Apostle Paul unfolds this last section, it really fits our church so very well.

Now remember, he had commended the Thessalonian church on a number of occasions in this letter. Back in chapter 1, verse 2 he says, "We give thanks to God for you all making mention of you in our prayers." He was thankful for all of them. He tells why in verse 3, "Their work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope was consistent." And then down in verse 6 he says, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord, you received the Word and much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, you became an example to all the believers." Then in verse 8, "The Word of the Lord sounded out from you." In verse 9, he said, "You turn to God from idols to serve a living and true God." In

verse 10, he says, "You're even waiting for His Son from heaven." And over again in chapter 2 and verse 13, he says, "We constantly thank God that when you received from us the Word of God's message, you accepted it not as the Word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." And then again he says, "You became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus, and you endured the sufferings that come at the hands of your own countrymen." They were dedicated folks, and they had believed the truth, and their faith was real, and their love was strong, and their hope was firm.

Down in verse 17, they were such a beloved church that he wanted to see their face so badly. He had desired it. He had tried to come. He says in verse 19, "You're my hope, my joy, my crown of exaltation." In verse 20, "You're my glory, you're my joy," he says. And over in chapter 3, verse 6, Timothy came back from a visit and "brought us good news of your faith and love and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you." Verse 8 indicates that they were standing firm in the Lord. In verse 9 he says, "What thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account." They were a good church. They were a wonderful church. They were an excellent church. They were moving in the right direction. They were in process. And yet he can say in chapter 3, verse 10, "We still want to come and complete what is lacking in your faith." You're doing well; you could do better. You're moving on the right track; you could even go faster and farther.

But whatever spiritual deficiencies existed in Thessalonica, they were not life threatening to the church. They were not fatal. There was just room for growth. Here was a truly saved church. Here was a sanctified church. They were moving toward the direction of holiness. Here was a surrendered church, yielded to the lordship of Christ, and following Christian duty to do the will of God with excellence. And here was a soulwinning church, evangelizing, sounding forth the Word of God, far and wide. Here was a Second Coming church, waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. All things being considered, this is a noble group. But they could do better. They hadn't arrived. They weren't perfect. There was still process to follow. There was still progress to make.

And even though they were anticipating the coming of Christ, and anticipating His gathering together of the church, and anticipating the judgment of the day of the Lord at that final coming, they needed to live continually in the present tense, moving along the path of spiritual progress. And so here you have in verses 12 through 22 some very straightforward, direct exhortation as to how they are to live within the church, here and now. And we will find it, beloved, very instructive and very encouraging to our own hearts as we look closely at it.

Now, the section falls into four categories. There is a discussion of responsibility regarding leaders, responsibility regarding brothers and sisters mutually, responsibility regarding worshiping God, and responsibility regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Those four dimensions are discussed. For this morning, we're just going to begin with the first category. In giving them instruction as to how they are to live in the church in order to work toward being a healthy flock, he starts with a relationship between the sheep and the shepherds. Let's look at verse 12. "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another." We'll stop at that point.

Those two verses speak of the issue of the relationship between pastors and people, shepherds and sheep. And, beloved, I say to you this is where health in the church begins. Nothing is more

devastating to the spiritual progress of a church than an unwholesome relationship between the shepherds and the sheep. You can't have a healthy flock with that kind of problem. If shepherds are not fulfilling their proper spiritual responsibility to the sheep, and sheep are not fulfilling their proper spiritual responsibility to the shepherd, the church can never be what God intends it to be. It cannot break down at that very, very significant level. The relationship that we have with you and you have with us as leaders is crucial in the church. And, frankly, devastation of a massive proportion occurs in churches where there is a breakdown of confidence, trust, love, affection between shepherds and sheep. When integrity goes, and credibility goes, and confidence goes, and trust goes, and love goes, and affection goes, at the point of that relationship, you have devastated the life of that church. And even though there are only two verses committed to this, the truths herein are replete throughout the New Testament, and we could literally spend months just tracking out the things that you're going to see in these two verses. In fact, it's going to take us two weeks to go through these two verses, and that's a concession. It could take us two months – or two years, for that matter.

Whatever the church is of beauty, whatever the church is of joy, whatever the church is of effectiveness, whatever the church is of power is dependent initially upon the relationship between the shepherds and the sheep, the sheep and the shepherds. Now, I will say to you that in the twenty-some years I've been at Grace Community Church, there have been times when in the lives of some people this relationship has broken down. There have been times when some of the shepherds of Grace Church have been major disappointments to the sheep, and the disintegration of relationships at that point has been the most severe trauma this church has ever experienced. And there have been times in this church when the sheep have been of major disappointment to the shepherds, and again, the trauma of those occasions has been the most severe the church has ever experienced.

If we have ever had difficulty in our church, if we have ever had chaos in our church to any degree – and it's always been somewhat minor – but when we have had it, we have had it because there has been a disillusionment in the minds of people at this particular point of relationship. When people, for whatever reasons, lose confidence in their shepherds, or when shepherds, for whatever reasons, lose confidence in their people and their sheep, you have devastation in the church. This relationship is crucial. And it's very clear that the Apostle Paul in these two verses makes a major point out of that.

Now, all we need to do is focus on two points, one this morning, one next Sunday. For this morning, let's talk about the responsibility of the shepherds to the sheep – the responsibility of the shepherds to the sheep. What do we owe to you? With the recognition that whatever problems there are in the church can really be laid, in one way or another, at the feet of this particular relationship, we have to give careful attention to it.

What then is the responsibility of the shepherds to the sheep? Now, you have an outline in your bulletin, you can look at it. I've given you three points, that's what Paul gives. We'll look at them. Before we do that, let me give you a little bit of brief background. As the New Testament unfolds – we need to make a point of identification here. As the New Testament unfolds, it becomes clear who the leaders of the church are. The leaders of the church are identified under four basic titles, four basic New Testament descriptions, or words, terms. And you're familiar with them. Number one: the very familiar term "elder," *presbuteros*. Now, that identifies a church leader as one characterized by – mark this – spiritual maturity and wisdom – spiritual maturity and wisdom. The leaders are those who are spiritually mature, spiritually wise. That term, elder, is used over and over and over again in the New Testament. Very early on, as the church is being established in the book of Acts, it is a high

priority to make sure that those churches have elders; that is, men who are characterized by spiritual maturity and spiritual wisdom, who can lead the church. And you find very clear characteristics required of such men given in 1 Timothy chapter 3, Titus chapter 1. Their duties are outlined without any lack of clarity throughout the New Testament. We understand very clearly what an elder is: a spiritually mature, spiritually wise man given responsibility to lead the church.

There's another word that is used to describe this man, this leader; that is the word overseer, sometimes translated by the Old English word bishop. It is the word *episkopos* in the Greek; it means to look over, to oversee. This indicates that the church leader is not only characterized by spiritual maturity and spiritual wisdom, but by spiritual oversight and spiritual authority. In this word, you have oversight and authority. They go together. And you find, for example, that word used in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus chapter 1 as the word to describe church leaders. They are overseers. It is also used in Philippians 1:1 and Acts 20:28.

Then you have a third word that we're all familiar with, and that's the word pastor. It means shepherd, it comes from *poimēn*. This indicates that the leader in the church is characterized by spiritual feeding and spiritual protection. Here you're looking at the duty that he has to feed the flock and protect them from the wolves. So the leader in the church is characterized by spiritual maturity, spiritual wisdom, spiritual oversight, spiritual authority, spiritual feeding, and spiritual protection.

And there's a fourth term that is used. It is the word *hēgoumenois*, which literally means "those who led you." And we'll just use the word leader, or chief. This indicates that the one who is responsible as an overseer, elder, or pastor should be characterized by spiritual discernment and spiritual guidance. In other words, he is effective as a leader because he can assess the condition, and move people to a better condition, guide them in a right path.

What then is the leader of the church? He is a man with spiritual maturity, spiritual wisdom, spiritual oversight, spiritual authority, who spiritually feeds, spiritually protects people, who provide spiritual discernment of their condition, and spiritual guidance to a better place. That's the leader.

Now, putting such shepherds in place was crucial in the early church, and so in Acts you have in chapter 14, verse 23 Paul ordaining elders in every city. It was crucial that the church had shepherds, shepherds to provide the wisdom, and the discernment, and the direction, and the leadership, and the guidance, and the teaching, and the protection, all of that. That was their responsibility.

Now, a very important footnote about the Thessalonian church: we all know that this church is only months old so you have a lot of brand-new Christians. How in that kind of congregation can you find elders who are spiritually mature, and spiritually wise, and who are profound articulators of truth, and who can give people great direction for the future, and all that? How you going to find that in a congregation like that? Well, you probably won't - at least you won't find people who have arrived, but you will find people who are in process. And while there is in this letter no mention of elders, no mention of overseers, no mention of pastors, and no mention of leaders, there is definitely in verse 12 the mention of people who have charge over you. So Paul, with apostolic authority, led by the Holy Spirit, had identified certain men, and given them the leadership, and they were really sort of like elders in process. They don't bear the title but they were certainly given responsibility and were moving in that direction, and someday, no doubt, would be called elder, overseer, pastor, leaders. Not yet bearing the title, they were learning the roles of leadership. And that wouldn't have been

easy, and I'll tell you why. They were all young Christians. They were all sort of equally old in the Lord, which makes it difficult for someone to take the leadership role, when others know that he is no more a mature in terms of time than they are. It would also be difficult because very likely this church came, for the most part, from the common people, and many of them may have been slaves. And then when they were selected for spiritual giftedness, and by the apostles, identified through the working of the Holy Spirit, as those gifted by God to be leaders in the church, they would come out of a kind of a lifestyle where they weren't used to leadership. They wouldn't have come out of the culture as leaders. They would not have had positions of authority in their society. So they were learning all about leadership, and all about spiritual wisdom, and all about spiritual maturity, all in one process of development. So it was not an easy thing.

And it could have been that there was a point of conflict in the Thessalonian church, and some were wondering why these others had charge over them, and they were a little bit nonsubmissive. And it was that somewhat conflicting situation that promotes these couple of verses, encouraging people to live in peace with each other. Verse 14 says there were some unruly people, there were some fainthearted, there were some weak, and there were some who demanded patience. Verse 15 indicates that some people were rendering evil, and you weren't to give evil back, so there was some conflict in the church. As I said, it wasn't fatal and life threatening, but it was there. And that kind of conflict in the church could be remedied if the shepherds and the sheep did their proper duties.

Beloved, when there is conflict in the church, and when churches split – and they split constantly – it is conflict, usually at this level. And Paul wants that resolved immediately, and so there have been some men identified as leaders. By the way, no doubt Paul did that, and he did it under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and I submit to you that even though we don't have apostles today to do that, elders, pastors, overseers, and leaders are still to be put in place by the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can raise up shepherds in a church. They aren't self-appointed, like Diotrephes who loved to have the preeminence. They aren't appointed by popular vote. The plurality of godly shepherds in a church become known to the church because it is so obvious that they are holy, Spiritled, Godgifted men, who function in that role. We don't have apostles to identify them now, but we do have mature godly pastor/elders to identify others. And even the congregation can assess and see. That's why once a year we allow you to let us know who among you has demonstrated pastoral capability and ministry.

Now, because this relationship was so new in Thessalonica, and because they were doing so well, and growing so well, Paul didn't want to overstate the case, and he didn't want to threaten them as if there was some kind of fatal flaw, and so the words that open verse 12 are very gentle. Look at verse 12, "But we request of you, brethren" – very amiable. This is a gentle kind of approach from the Apostle. It lacks that apostolic dictum that sometimes he can give. It's more the request from a friend. He used the same phrase, by the way, in chapter 4, verse 1, again not threatening them, because they were doing so well. Here he is saying the same thing: "You're doing well in your relationship shepherds to sheep and sheep to shepherds. You're doing well. I just want to encourage you to do better." And so there's a gentle request here, rather than a threat.

Now, let's look then at that first point. What is the shepherd's responsibility to the sheep? Or what are the shepherd's responsibilities to the sheep, plural? Number one: we have the responsibility to labor among the sheep. You'll look down in verse 12, and you'll notice this phrase, "Those who labor among you." There is the first identifying mark of their pastors, their elders, their leaders, their would-be in-process overseers. "They diligently labor among you." The phrase is self-evident. You don't

need much of an explanation, just a few technical details. There's that word *kopiaō* again that Paul loves to use that means to work to the point of sweat and exhaustion, to exhibit great exertion and great effort, to work until you're weary. And he characterizes the pastor as one who works diligently, who labors to the point of sweat and exhaustion among his people. That is the sphere of his ministry. His responsibility is not outside the church, it's not long distance; it's intimately involved with the church. Like a shepherd would be intimately involved with the sheep, like a father would be intimately involved with a family, he is to be involved with his people, among the people, in the midst of the people, alongside of them in spiritual labor. What's he doing? Explaining the gospel, explaining the truth, applying the truth, warning them, admonishing them, counseling them, helping them. Paul, you'll remember, in Acts 20 went house to house, house to house, teaching the things of God with great dedication, and great effort, touching the personal lives of people, pouring his life into the flock that God had given him, even as any faithful shepherd would do.

Go back to chapter 2 for a moment, verse 9, and see a little more deeply into the pattern of Paul. "For he did not say what he would not do, for you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." Now, when he came there, there was no church to support him. There was no place to take an offering to sustain him. He had to work with his own hands, earn his own living, work night and day on just taking care of himself and everybody traveling with him, and then had to pour himself totally into the founding of a church. He knew what it was to work hard. He knew what it was to work sacrificially. He knew what it was to give himself – literally, to spend himself – in reaching those people. And then in verse 7 of 1 Thessalonians 2, he likens himself to a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her own children. And that, dear friends, as you well know is a nonstop, 24hour a day job, nursing a baby. And Paul treated his congregation with the intimacy of a nursing mother.

Later on, he talks about the particular relationship of the father that he had to them, where he took the Word of God right down to their living level, and applied it in their individual lives, in that same second chapter. Over in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 he says that he commands them, in his second letter to them, to stay aloof "from every brother who leads an unruly life, and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we didn't act in an undisciplined manner among you. We didn't eat anybody's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you; not because we don't have the right to be supported, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you that you might follow our example."

The pastor is to work diligently. You see, what a pastor is doing is basically asking people who are earning a living to also give their lives to the ministry of the church. They have to do both. Paul says if I was going to teach you how to do both, I needed to do both also. God does not ask all of us to do that. And if we are not called to do it the way Paul did it, we are certainly called to be so diligent that we spend our lives in giving ourselves to ministry.

That's what Paul was doing. He knew that if he was going to be a faithful leader he would have to demonstrate the level of effort, and exertion, and work, and labor that was necessary. And so he says – you'll note there again that marvelous statement in verse 7, "We didn't act in an undisciplined manner." The only way you can work hard and be productive is to be disciplined – to be disciplined. This calls for a disciplined life, strictly ordered, under control. And then down in verse 13 of 2 Thessalonians 3 he gives a good hint and says, "Don't get weary in doing well." Keep your energy, work hard, to the point of sweat and exhaustion.

In order to do that, and do it right, you have to be very, very disciplined. Faithful pastors are not undisciplined people who show up on Sunday. Faithful pastors are highly disciplined people whose lives are brought into line, so that they can pour their whole life in to the flock God has given them. This kind of principle is repeated many, many places, but no better is it stated than in Colossians 1:28, where Paul says, "We proclaim Christ, admonishing every man, teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ." It's an absolutely astounding goal. Paul didn't say, "I'm just trying to get people saved by the skin of their chinny-chin-chin; I'm not just trying to get them in the door. I am going to admonish every man, and teach every man with all wisdom, to present every man complete in Christ. I am not content with their salvation, I am not content with marginal spirituality. I want them complete in Christ, and for this purpose I *kopiaō*. I labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion, agonizing – agonizing. It's a consuming thing.

A faithful shepherd knows his sheep, and touches their lives, and pours his whole life into them. That's his calling. That's his duty. That's his responsibility. And yet there are so many in the ministry who give so little to the church they're in. They take a lot; spend their time in other places, and other enterprises. First Timothy 4:10, he says, "It is this for which we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men." And again he used that word *kopiaō* and *agōnizomai*. We work to the point of sweat and exhaustion, and we agonize because we are dealing with eternal matters.

This is a major effort. Paul chronicles the pain of his own effort over and over again. He talks about all of the difficulty that he had. He doesn't decry the responsibility; he's just honest about the difficulty. But in one very interesting text in 1 Corinthians 15:10, looking at all the others who have preached, and all the others who have worked, he says, "I labored even more than all of them," and then he gives all the credit to the grace of God working in him. It's sometimes hard to get it across to young men who are going to be shepherds that the difference between great effectiveness in the ministry and mediocrity is effort – is effort. There's no secrets, there's no magic; it's work, it's effort. I'm reminded of the words of Amy Carmichael. She wrote, "God, harden me against myself, the coward with pathetic voice who craves for ease, and rest, and joy. Myself, arch traitor to myself, my hollowest friend, my deadliest foe, my clog whatever road I go," end quote. Unless you can overcome yourself, competing against your own tendency to be lazy, indifferent, to be at ease, you cannot have the disciplined life that results in the exertion and the effort that leads to the effectiveness.

Now, this sets the example, as well as being the pattern for the servant duty that is characteristic of every shepherd. Leadership success comes to those who are willing to work to exhaustion – listen to this – for the sake of objectives great enough to demand total sacrifice. If the objectives are great enough, how can you give less? And someone said, "A cross, yes, a cross stands in the way of spiritual leadership, a cross on which the leader must consent to be impaled." It was said of one leader, "He belonged to that class of early martyrs whose passionate soul made an early holocaust of the physical man." And Richard Baxter was right when he said, "This is not a burden for the shoulders of a child." It takes a man, every bit a man, to shoulder the responsibility of the labor that is required among the sheep. And I guess it would be true to say the world is run by tired men, and so is the church.

Now, there's a balance there. I remember when Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the Scottish minister, died, lay dying at the age of 29. He turned to a friend who was sitting with him by his bed, and he

said, "I have killed the horse, and now I can't deliver the message." There's a point at which you maybe go a little too far, but the shepherd's tour of duty in the church calls for exhausting labor among the sheep. It's his responsibility to give himself as a servant to the sheep, to meet their needs in every area that he can. And some of that involves delegating and sharing the load, but it's the work that has to be done.

Secondly, he not only has responsibility to labor among the sheep, but secondly, authority over the sheep; and that is very clearly indicated. Look at that verse 12 again, "And have charge over you in the Lord – and have charge over you in the Lord." Charge over you, *proistēmi*, means to stand before someone, or to preside, or to lead, or to direct. It's used in 1 Timothy chapter 3 three times, verse 4, 5 and 12, and 1 Timothy 5:17 in reference to elders, and pastors, and leaders in the church, and it means to be in charge, to have authority. It is a delegated authority, admittedly; delegated by Christ. But we stand in the place of Christ – we are under-shepherds, under the great Shepherd, as Peter calls Him. Notice it says, "We have charge over you."

We preside over you. We lead you. We direct you. We have the responsibility to give you spiritual wisdom, spiritual protection, spiritual direction, spiritual guidance. It's our responsibility to cover all of those kinds of things, to take care of the general health of the church, to set the group spirit, the group morale, the spiritual tone, to bring about a functioning unity, to handle people in personal relationships, and all their difficulties in life, to solve problems by discovering problems, evaluating options, finding solutions, working for change. It's our responsibility to do creative planning, strategy, assessment, analysis, criticism, find methods to reach spiritual objectives. It's our responsibility to provide that leadership for you. We have charge over you.

Please notice the little phrase "in the Lord." We're not self-appointed. It's not manmade. You didn't give us that authority. We didn't take it on our own. It's not from men. We are called, equipped, appointed by God. It is our duty to rule for His sake, the Lord's sake, not for personal power, personal prestige, personal gain, personal career advancement, but for the Lord. That little phrase "in the Lord" is the sphere in which our authority rests. Our authority is in Him. He delegated it to us. We only have it as we're obedient to His Word and His will. We have a delegated authority. It is not our own, and it does not go beyond the expression of His will, in His Word and through His Spirit. And so, we are given authority, but only in the Lord, not beyond that.

I've said to you a number of times, when you get me outside the Word of God and its application to the life of the church, I have no authority. My authority only is only in the Lord, delegated to me to operate through the Word, and by the direction of the Spirit of God through the application of that Word. And so we have an oversight of great responsibility. Peter says in 1 Peter 5 we're not to lord it over the flock, we're not to dominate you, like it says back in Luke's gospel the Gentiles do, they dominate. Not that kind. It is a loving, gentle, delegated authority that does not serve us but serves you, does not exalt us but lifts you up.

So, the responsibility on the side of the shepherds then is to work hard among the sheep, serving all of their needs, and then to exercise authority over them. That is, to lead them in the right direction, to correct them, to solve their problems, to bring unity and harmony, to make one people who are disunited, to build back relationships; to give direction, to set the spiritual tone – all of that.

And then thirdly, and finally – and these are very simple and direct – the end of verse 12 says, "And give you instruction." The third responsibility of shepherds to the sheep is instruction for the sheep.

Labor among the sheep, authority over the sheep, instruction for the sheep – and give you instruction. That's from the verb *noutheteō*, which is often translated in the New Testament “admonish.” You've seen it many times, the word “admonish” in your Bible. And basically, it is instruction, but instruction with a view toward correction. It carries the idea of if you keep going this way you're going to have problems; you've got to turn and go this way. It is not pedantic, it is not academic, it is not just data, it is not just information, it is instruction with a view toward changing people, toward correcting them. And I tell young men in teaching them to preach, you always preach for change, you always preach for verdict, for someone to say, “I'm here, I ought to be there, this is what I need to do” – always. Every sermon, in principle, is to take people to the point where they see what they ought to be, where they see what they are not, and move them toward what they ought to be. So it's teaching with an element of warning, an element of correction, an element of channeling them toward holy living. We could say it's tender instruction toward holy living. It's used in 1 Corinthians 4:14 of how a father instructs his beloved children. Paul telling the Corinthians that “I taught you like a father teaching beloved children, I admonished you.” You gently, tenderly instruct them, away from those things that hurt them, toward those things that bless them. And, of course, the source of that is the Word of God, isn't it?

And shepherds then are to be skilled instructors – skilled instructors. And by the way, that's the only specific skill that they are said to have to have in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1. The only skill out of all the character qualities, the only skill is they are to be apt to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2, skilled teachers. First Timothy 4:6 and 1 Timothy 4:16 reiterate the importance of their teaching responsibility. These leaders of the church, these shepherds are to be skilled teachers. Why? Well, you look at Titus 1 for a moment, verse 9, “So that they can hold fast the faithful Word which is in accordance with the doctrine.” In other words, for the positive effort of holding fast the faithful Word according to sound doctrine. In other words, so they can teach the truth. Then, in order that they may be able to exhort in sound doctrine, and refute those who contradict, positive and negative. You want to exhort those who believe the truth to do the truth, you want to exhort those who deny the truth to give up their error and accept the truth. So it's a positive and a negative. You have to build your instruction then around the knowledge of the truth and skill in applying it.

He says there are many rebellious men, empty talkers, and deceivers; they have to be silenced. Who is going to silence them? You are, by the strength and power of your ability to refute their error with the Word, and you're going to build the church by the strength and power of your ability to articulate the truth. We are given, says Ephesians 4, to the church for the edification of the saints. How do you get edified? Through the Word of God which is able to build you up, or edify you, Acts 20:32 says.

So if the Word of God builds you up, and my job is to build you up, then I've got to give you the Word of God which builds you up. I have to be skilled at that, that I might do it in such a way that it impacts powerfully your life; in such a way that it impacts those who deny the truth by giving them irrefutable arguments. And if there is anything – and this is a personal word – if there is anything in my life that drives me, that really compels me in the ministry above all other things, it is my view of Scripture. Because I believe the Scripture is the holy, inerrant, inspired Word of God, it is so sacred to me that I have hanging over my head this tremendous fear of ever misrepresenting it, or of ever ignoring any of its truths. Realizing every word is pure, and every word out of the mind of God given to us on these pages was for our edification in one way or another, I must be committed to teaching it all. People say, “Why do you go over every verse, every phrase, every word?” Because everyone came from God; who am I to edit God? I'm not God's editor. And I'm not even God's interpreter. I have to allow the Scripture by God to interpret the Scripture. Let God interpret His own Word.

And so, the thing that drives me and compels me is the view of Scripture that I have. And, of course, behind it the view of God as a holy God who spoke His Word that it might be spoken to men. And so, not only are we to labor among you, and take authority over you, but we are to instruct you, and that with great skill. Listen to what Richard Baxter said several centuries ago. "To preach a sermon, what skill is necessary to make the truth plain, to convince the hearers, to let irresistible light into their consciences, and keep it there, and drive all home; to screw the truth into their minds, and work Christ into their affections; to meet every objection, and clearly to resolve it; to drive sinners to a stand, and make them see that there is no hope, but that they must unavoidably either be converted or condemned – and to do all this, as regards language and style, as befits our work, and yet as is most suitable to the capacities of the hearers? This, and a great deal more that should be done in every sermon, must surely require a great deal of holy skill.

So great a God, whose message we deliver, should be honored by our delivery of it. It is a lamentable case, that in the message from the God of heaven of everlasting moment to the souls of men, we should behave ourselves so weakly, so unhandsomely, so imprudently, or so slightly, that the whole business should miscarry in our hands, and God should be dishonored, and His work disgraced, and sinners rather hardened than converted; and all this through our weakness or neglect. How often have carnal hearers gone home jeering at the palpable and dishonorable failings of the preacher? How many sleep under us, because our hearts and tongues are sleepy, and we bring not with us so much skill and zeal as to awake them?", end quote.

No king, no President, no politician, no doctor, no lawyer, no judge, no military commander on earth has such an awesome responsibility as the one who shepherds the sheep by giving instruction out of the Word of God. To prostitute that is a frightening, frightening error.

And what then is the shepherd's responsibility to the sheep? Very simple: to work among you, to have authority over you, to lead you in the path that God has designed, and to feed you consistently the truth that will instruct you away from the path of sin into holy living. Faithful shepherds are to discharge that responsibility.

Now, time is gone, but next Sunday is your time. Let's pray. Thank You, Father, for our morning together, for the impact of Your truth. Make us faithful shepherds to these dear precious sheep, and raise up more faithful shepherds, Lord, in the days ahead, that Your flock might be what You would want it to be. We thank You, Lord, that the church is like Noah's ark. It is, but not because of the smell; it's like Noah's ark because it's a place of safety and protection, a place of fellowship and preservation, and the smell inside is far more tolerable than the deaths outside. Thank You for making us part of Your church. May we love it, because You loved it, and gave Your life for it. May we love it to the degree that we're faithful shepherds, and faithful sheep, until Jesus comes, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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