

Message One

The Urgent Need of Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church

Scripture Reading: John 21:15-17; 8:2-11; 10:10, 16; Psa. 23:1-6; Luke 15:3-24; Eph. 4:11-12

- I. The meaning of shepherding is to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock—John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; cf. Psa. 23:1-2:**
 - 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. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament reveal Christ as the Shepherd according to God's heart—Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-31; John 10:11; Heb. 13:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Rev. 7:16-17:**
 - A. As the mighty One, the ruling and judging One, Christ comes to be a Shepherd; He cares for His flock by ruling and correcting His sheep and by feeding His flock, gathering the lambs in His arm, carrying them in His bosom, and leading those who are nursing the young—Isa. 40:10-11; Matt. 2:6; 9:36.
 - B. Ezekiel 34:11-31 prophesies that the Lord Himself will come as the Shepherd to search for His sheep and seek them out—cf. Luke 15:1-7.
 - C. Christ is the Good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, the Shepherd of our souls, and the eternal Shepherd—John 10:9-17; Heb. 13:20-21; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2:25; Rev. 7:16-17.
- III. In His heavenly ministry the Lord Jesus continues the shepherding that He began in His earthly ministry—Heb. 13:20-21:**
 - A. In John 21:15-17 the Lord commissioned Peter to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep in His absence, while He is in the heavens; this was to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ's heavenly ministry to shepherd God's flock:
 1. What He was doing in the heavens, the apostles did on earth to carry out His heavenly ministry—Heb. 13:20-21; John 21:15-17.
 2. Regarding shepherding, the apostolic ministry cooperates with Christ's heavenly ministry—vv. 15-17.
 - B. The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ's heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God—cf. Eph. 3:2, 8-9; 1 Pet. 5:10.
- IV. Christ has been constituted into us; this is what gives us the burden to take care of others—1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 3:17; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a; cf. John 10:11:**
 - A. The part of our being that has been constituted of Christ is the part that shepherds others.
 - B. In ourselves we cannot shepherd anyone, but Christ constituted into us is the Shepherd.
- V. Shepherding is to take care of the children of God by feeding them—John 21:15-17:**
 - A. The work of shepherding is the work of feeding—Matt. 24:45; 1 Cor. 3:2.
 - B. The shepherds' feeding is not only for the growth unto the believers' daily salvation but also unto their maturity in the divine life, which is needed for the God-men to be built up into the Body of Christ—Heb. 5:14; Eph. 4:12-13.

VI. 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:
 - 1. Shepherding and teaching should be like two feet for our move with the Lord—Acts 20:20, 27-28.
 - 2. Our shepherding should always be with teaching, and our teaching should always be with shepherding.
 - 3. Teaching not only strengthens our shepherding, but it also helps us to reach the goal of shepherding—Psa. 23:6b; John 10:11, 14-16; 14:2.
- B. If we fail in shepherding and teaching, the whole church will become desolate—2 Tim. 2:20; Rev. 2:20, 24.
- C. For the shepherding of the saints, there must be the healthy teaching in the vital groups—2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9.
- D. Only the teaching of the apostles concerning the economy of God can transform the saints; therefore, we need to shepherd the saints with the apostles' teaching according to God's economy—Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9.
- E. Shepherding and teaching are our obligation as a charge given to us by the Lord; this is the basic way ordained by God in the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate His eternal goal—the New Jerusalem—Eph. 4:16; Rev. 21:2.

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

- A. All believers, regardless of their stage of spiritual growth, need shepherding.
- B. All of us need to be under the organic shepherding of Christ and be one with Him to shepherd others—1 Pet. 2:25; John 21:16.
- C. We are both sheep and shepherds, shepherding and being shepherded in mutuality; through this mutual shepherding, the Body builds itself up in life—Eph. 4:16.

VIII. In the Lord's recovery today, there is an urgent need of shepherding—John 21:16; 1 Pet. 5:4:

- A. The greatest lack among us is in the matter of shepherding.
- B. To shepherd the believers is very crucial for their growth in life; we need to take the shepherding way to preach the gospel and revive the church:
 - 1. "The way that can save people effectively must be by small vital groups, and everyone in this small vital group must be a shepherd. After a short time the church will be revived. No other way is more prevailing than this shepherding way"—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 4, p. 451.
 - 2. "I hope that there will be a genuine revival among us by our receiving this burden of shepherding. If all the churches receive this teaching to participate in Christ's wonderful shepherding, there will be a big revival in the recovery"—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 5, p. 92.
 - 3. "For many years in the Lord's recovery our defect has been the shortage of shepherding... We are short of fruit because we do not have the adequate shepherding, and we have troubles because of the shortage of shepherding... 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"—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 5, p. 205.

4. “At the end of 1942 the church in Chefoo had a great revival. The revival was not brought in by holding conferences or because of human incitement; rather, it was brought in through visiting and shepherding the saints house to house...On the one hand, I went to visit the saints in their homes; on the other hand, I invited them to come for a meal in order to talk and fellowship with them. This visitation and shepherding were very effective”—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 4, p. 524.
5. “If this kind of fellowship is received by us, I believe there will be a big revival on the earth, not by spiritual giants but by the many members of Christ’s Body being shepherds who follow the steps of the processed Triune God in seeking and gaining fallen man”—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 5, pp. 91-92.