

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

27 What Is the Gift of Shepherding?

The fourth gift of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 is the gift of shepherding. This is the only instance in the entire New Testament where the word “pastor” is used. The Greek word is “poimen,” meaning “shepherd.” The office of the shepherd is better understood through the use of three very interesting words: **(1) Bishop** – “episcopos” meaning overseer and having to do with the work of the shepherd; **(2) Elder** – “presbuteros” meaning elder and having to do with the rank and dignity of the shepherd; **(3) Pastor** – “poimen” meaning shepherd and having to do with the shepherd’s relationship to the flock. All three of these words are referred to in Acts 20:17, 28. The qualifications of a pastor are given in I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9, and in I Peter 5:1-4. Pastors who are worthy are held in double honor (I Timothy 5:17).

The Apostle Peter refers to the Lord as the Chief Shepherd (I Peter 5:4). This title seems to emphasize the existence of under shepherds. This gift of the Spirit is much cherished by the people of God and a worthy pastor is a true blessing from heaven. However, not everyone who has the gift of shepherding is a pastor. The shepherding gift is not confined to the pastorate. Let us consider three of the characteristics of the ancient shepherd and understand more of the gift which the Holy Spirit has given to the Church.

I. EARLY SHEPHERDS GUARDED THEIR SHEEP:

Many dangers faced the flock as it fed on the mountain. Sometimes it would come in the form of a bear, a lion, a crevice, the scorching sun, and the ever-present desire of the sheep to just wander off. For these reasons the shepherd would carry a sling, and rod. Further, he would anoint their heads with oil. A hireling would flee in time of danger, but a true shepherd would surrender his life for his sheep. Paul knew false teachers would hound the flocks of God and urged the Ephesian elders to take heed. (Acts 20:28-31) For one pastor to keep a careful eye on hundreds of sheep is an impossible task, and for that reason there is the need for the pastoral gift in the church. When a member of the flock displeased the Lord, it was the saints, not the pastor, who were to admonish. (II Thessalonians 3:15; Romans 15:14)

II. EARLY SHEPHERDS GUIDED THEIR SHEEP:

It is not difficult to imagine a gentle shepherd leading his flock beside still waters and making them lie down in green pastures. Whether a matter of difficult terrain, steep climbs, or rushing waters, the shepherd was there to guide. Psalm 23 is an amazing description of this pastoral ability. People who have the shepherding gift are in a position to salvage lives from rash and destructive ways.

III. EARLY SHEPHERDS GRAZED THEIR SHEEP:

Isaiah 40:11 tells us that the coming Messiah *“shall feed His flock like a shepherd.”* In the New Testament the verb form of the word pastor is used three times and each time it is connected with food. Jesus told Peter, *“Feed my sheep.”* (John 21:16) Paul instructed, *“feed the church of God.”* (Acts 20:28) Peter enjoined, *“feed the flock of God which is among you.”* (I Peter 5:2) The study of words reveals that the word “pastor” comes from the verb “to feed.” A pastor is a feeder of the sheep. We should understand further, that the feeding is not confined to the pastorate. Exercising this gift means steering others into the place of spiritual nourishment.

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