

#4 Shepherding the Flock of God according to God by Being Patterns of the Flock

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I . To shepherd the flock of God according to God is to shepherd the flock of God according to God's desire:

1 Pet. 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;

A. We must see that the heart's desire, the good pleasure, of God in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to dispense Himself into His chosen people for their satisfaction and enjoyment; the goal of this enjoyment is to produce the church, God's counterpart, as God's increase, God's enlargement, to be God's fullness for His expression.

Jer. 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew out for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, Which hold no water.

① Instead of drinking Him to become His increase for His expression, we can become like Israel by forsaking God as the fountain of living waters to hew out cisterns (typifying idols) to replace God as our enjoyment.

② An idol is anything within us that we love more than the Lord or that replaces the Lord in our life; whatever we possess, and even whatever we are, can become an idol.

③ Our peace, safety, health, and possessions may become idols to us, but God is faithful in His purpose to take these things away so that we might drink of Him as the fountain of living waters; God is faithful in leading us into His economy, and His economy is for us to enjoy Christ, to absorb Christ, to drink Christ, to eat Christ, and to assimilate Christ so that God may increase in us for His expression. **[Mon]**

B. We must be brought back to the realization that we need Christ as our enjoyment; we also have to help others to know how to enjoy Christ, and we have to bring the distracted believers back to the simplicity of the genuine appreciation, love, and enjoyment of the precious person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as their life and everything.

2 Cor. 11:3 But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ.

① To enjoy Christ as our life supply should be the primary matter in the church life; the content of the church life depends upon the enjoyment of Christ; the more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be.

② First Corinthians is a book on the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ; the enjoyment of the crucified and resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit solves all the problems in the church.

1 Cor. 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **[Tue]**

II . We must shepherd the flock of God by being patterns of the flock; the apostle Paul, as a pattern to all the believers, the members of the Body of Christ, lived Christ for His magnification as His continuation:

Acts 20:19 Serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews;

20 How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house,

A. Paul was a disciple of Christ—seeing Christ, hearing Christ, and learning Christ as the reality is in Jesus.

B. Paul was a chosen vessel of Christ to contain Him, be filled with Him, and overflow with Him for His fullness.

C. Paul was a man of prayer.

D. Paul depended on the Body, doing everything in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body.

E. Paul practiced calling on the name of the Lord.

[Wed]

Acts 20:27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God.

28 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.

F. Paul lived by the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus (the Spirit of a man with abundant strength for suffering) for his preaching ministry, a ministry of suffering carried out among human beings and for human beings in the human life for the building up of the Body of Christ.

G. Paul lived in his mingled spirit (the divine Spirit mingled with his human spirit as one spirit).

H. Paul was filled with the Spirit of joy, essentially for his existence, and with the Spirit of power, economically for his function.

I. Paul exercised himself to always have a good and pure conscience.

J. Paul lived a life of always rejoicing in the Lord, praying unceasingly, and thanking Him in everything.

K. Paul was allied with God and assisted by God to speak the gospel boldly in the name of Jesus to spread the testimony of Jesus unto the uttermost part of the earth. **[Thu]**

L. Paul cherished the saints in the humanity of

Jesus and nourished them in the divinity of Christ with all the truths of God's eternal economy, displaying in his living the word of the Lord Jesus that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20:31 Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.

M. Paul was a pattern to the elders in Ephesus, a pattern of what the elders should be to the church:
① He served the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials.

② He shepherded the saints by teaching them publicly and from house to house, declaring to them all the counsel of God, all of God's eternal economy.

③ He was burdened for the elders to see the precious love of God for the church and the preciousness, the exceeding worth, of the church in the eyes of God so that they would treasure the church as God did; he admonished the elders to "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"—v. 28.

④ He warned the elders concerning the destroyers of the divine building—those who are wolves, not sparing the flock, and those who speak perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.

⑤ He contacted each one of the saints, telling the elders to remember that "for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears"—v. 31.

⑥ Because Paul saw that the unique goal of God's calling is the building up of the Body of Christ and that Christ builds up the Body by the Body, he was a pattern to the elders in Ephesus of functioning to perfect all the saints "unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ—v. 12" so that all the saints would grow in life and would function in life according to their measure of life to be a supply of life to cause "the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love—v. 16".

Eph. 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. [Fri]

N. Paul's fourth ministry journey shows in a particular way his life of living Christ, magnifying Christ, doing all things in Christ, and pursuing Christ in order to be found in Christ:

Phil. 1:19...for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all

boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.

① All during the apostle's long and unfortunate imprisonment-voyage, the Lord kept the apostle in His ascendancy and enabled him to live a life far beyond the realm of anxiety; this life was fully dignified, with the highest standard of human virtues expressing the most excellent divine attributes.

② This was Jesus living again on the earth in His divinely enriched humanity! This was the wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continuing to live in the Acts through one of His many members! This was a living witness of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ!

③ In Paul's living and ministry he expressed the very true God, who in Jesus Christ had gone through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, and who, as the all-inclusive Spirit, was then living in him and through him.

④ On the sea in the storm, the Lord had made the apostle not only the owner of his fellow voyagers but also their life-guarantor and comforter; now, on the land in peace, the Lord made him furthermore not only a magical attraction in the eyes of the superstitious people but also a healer and a joy to them.

⑤ The warm welcome that Paul received from the brothers in Rome and the loving care of those in Puteoli show the beautiful Body life that existed in the early days among the churches and apostles:

a. Apparently, the apostle, as a prisoner in bonds, had entered the region of the dark capital of the Satan-usurped empire; actually, as the ambassador of Christ with His authority, he had come into another part of the participation in the Body life of Christ's church in the kingdom of God on earth.

b. While he was suffering the persecution of religion in the empire of Satan (the satanic chaos in the old creation), he was enjoying the church life in the kingdom of God (the divine economy for the new creation); this was a comfort and an encouragement to him.

O. The ultimate issue of the church will be the New Jerusalem in eternity future as God's full and eternal expression; this should be the reality and goal of all our gospel preaching today as we follow the pattern of the apostle Paul—"proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered"—Acts 28:31. [Sat]

Experience① :Entrust ourselves to the hand of the faithful God

When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we might have expected to have peace and blessing. But instead we might have had many troubles and might have lost our security, our health, or our possessions. When some Christians experience such things, they may question God's faithfulness and ask why He did not prevent hardships from happening to them.

We need to realize that in allowing us to have troubles, God is faithful in His purpose to turn us from idols and bring us back to Himself. Our peace, safety, health, and possessions may become idols to us, and God is faithful to take these things away so that we may drink of Him as the fountain of living waters. If our house or our possessions become idols to us, we drink of them and not of God. God's faithfulness is a matter of dealing with these idols and causing us to drink of Him. God is faithful in leading us into His economy.

For the New Ones

A brother's testimony: Two years after I started working for one company, I came to Kobe by being head-hunted by one small company in Kobe in a mysterious way. By the Lord's leading, I was clear that I came to Kobe for raising the church. So I assumed that things of the work would go smoothly. But when I started working in the company, I met all kinds of difficulties. For example, because I was head-hunted, I was given to live in the apartment in Port Island that the president owned. But because of this, I had intense attacks from the senior workers due to their jealousy. And also because I was treated as an executive even though I was still young, this also provoked their jealousy and eventually I was relegated. I could not understand why this kind of environment could come upon me because I was led to Kobe by the Lord. To escape from this kind of uncomfortable environment, I thought about changing the job, but I felt that Lord was not leading me to do so. Thus I remained in that company reluctantly. The uncomfortable environment got worse and worse, causing me to cry out "Lord, why such environment should come upon me?" But I could not gain any answer that I expected from the Lord.

Later I came to understand that in this relegated situation, I was actually learning a lot of things and experienced a lot which would be so useful in the future situation in the next companies I worked. For example, I worked in the manufacturing site of the crude drugs and was all covered by the powder. But in the midst of this work, I was taught the secret to solve the problems of making tablets of the crude drugs (the process of making tablets). And that experience helped me by offering the solution quickly when I moved to the big company later to solve the problem of making tablets from crude drugs that nobody could have solved. At that time, I was suffering, not understanding the Lord's

discipline for my benefit. But I can testify that the environment that Lord had arranged for me in His hand was not too short nor too much. His discipline was just perfect and right. This experience became a lesson to me to entrust myself into the Lord's hand in any environment. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord. Please read the following verses:

Heb. 12:5 *And you have completely forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."*⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? 10 For they disciplined for a few days as it seemed good to them; but He, for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness. 11 Now no discipline at the present time seems to be a matter of joy, but of grief; but afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised by it.

I Cor. 7:24 *Each one, brothers, in what status he was called, in this let him remain with God.*

FN「Remain with God」: After being called, the believers do not need to change their outward status, but they do need to have a change in their inward condition, that is, from being without God to being with God, in order to be one with God and have God with them in their status, whatever it may be.

Prayer: "Oh Lord Jesus, I do not realize my real need but you know it. I entrust myself into the discipline of Father God. I turn to the Lord inwardly first, and open to the Lord and fellowship. Then I open myself to the brothers and sisters. Let me see God's economy in my suffering. Amen."

Experience② :Making God's economy as the goal in your life

Not only did Paul teach, care for their interests, and care for the things that were profitable to them, but he declared also God's counsel, God's plan, and God's economy. No doubt, Paul taught the Ephesians a great deal concerning God's New Testament economy.

Similarly, all the elders must learn what God's New Testament economy is and point this out to the saints. By knowing God's eternal economy, most of the saints would then be solidly grounded and deeply rooted. Most Christians today receive only shallow teachings, instructing them to be good, humble, loving, and kind....The things of God's New Testament economy, God's eternal plan, and God's plan for the church are absolutely lacking among them. Hence, what is needed among us is the proper biblical, divine revelation concerning God's eternal economy.

The elders must learn all the things of God's economy and dive into them....They will be able to comfort the disappointed saints by telling them God's economy. To hear God's economy and receive such a high calling will become a strong comfort and encouragement to the

disappointed ones. The problems that we are facing today in the recovery are mainly due to the lack of a deep understanding and realization of God's eternal economy.

For junior and high school students/college students

Because you were saved for the fulfilment of God's economy, God's economy should be the goal in your life. Please sing the following hymn:

God has called us for His purpose,
His economy so glorious,
For which He was fully processed;
Consummated now is He!
As the Spirit, He indwells us;
As our God allotted portion,
Working out His full salvation,
Making us the same as He is.
Oh, may a clear, controlling vision of
The Lord's economy direct my heart,
And burn in me until my spirit's
wholly set afire!
With spirit strong and active we'll press on
To consummate God's goal—
New Jerusalem, Hallelujah!

The ultimate goal you study at school and prepare for the entrance exam is God's economy. God has passed through the process of incarnation, human living, death and resurrection and became the life giving Spirit for this economy. The life giving Spirit has entered into you and regenerated your spirit, making you the child of God, a brother of Christ and a member of the Body of Christ. Now you are enjoying Christ every day and supply Christ to the people in the church life for the building up of the Body of Christ. In this way, the corporate Body of Christ will be built up, expressing Christ corporately and shame Satan. The reason you were saved is not for the low goal, like having a good life. Please experience Christ subjectively in your study as wisdom, power, endurance, memory. You study not only for your grade but actually you are gaining Christ in your study.

Every morning and night, please renew your consecration for God's economy. If you do so, your future will surely be brighter and brighter because of God's economy.

Prayer: "Oh Lord Jesus, I was saved not to enjoy the good life, but for God's economy. Thank You that I have a wonderful goal. Open my eyes and show me the glorious vision of God's economy more. I renew my consecration every morning and night to promote God's economy. Amen!"

Experience ③ : All the brothers and sisters be perfected and nourished not according to yourself but according to God

In Acts 20:28 His own blood indicates the precious love of God for the church and the preciousness, the exceeding worth, of the church in the eyes of God. Here the apostle did not touch the divine life and nature of the church as in Ephesians 5:23-32, but the value of the church as a treasure to God, a treasure which He acquired with His own

precious blood. Paul expected that the elders as overseers would treasure the church as God did.

Both the Holy Spirit and God's own blood are divine provisions for the church that He treasures. The Holy Spirit is God Himself, and God's own blood denotes God's work. God's redemptive work acquired the church; now God Himself, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, cares for the church through the overseers.

Ephesians 3:2 speaks of the stewardship of the grace of God, and 4:12, of the building up of the Body of Christ....The stewardship of the grace of God is not limited to Paul and the other apostles. Do not think that Paul was such a steward and that you are not. Paul's intention here is to impress the saints with the fact that they all have received the stewardship of the grace of God for the building up of the Body of Christ. According to 4:12, the building up of the Body is not the work of the apostles alone; it is the responsibility of all the saints...[who] are perfected unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. The Greek word rendered "unto" in this verse also means "for the purpose of," "with a view to," or "resulting in." The perfecting of the saints results in the work of ministry, which in turn results in the building up of the Body of Christ. The Body is not built up directly by the apostles and the other leading ones; it is built up directly by the saints.

For Young working saints/graduate students

Young working saints and graduate students, please learn to nourish people according to God. Inside, you have a spirit that is regenerated. Outside, you have the word of God. The gospel friends and the backslidden saints don't know how to apply the Word into their actual situations. Please pray for them with members of the prayer group. When exercising the regenerated spirit to pray and fellowship for the new ones, the Lord gives you a sense and guides you. Following this guidance, you can go out and visit or send a message on LINE to nourish them. This is nourishing according to God. You need to be open to the Lord and your brothers and sisters to pasture them according to God. People who are not open hear nothing when they hear people's word. Because their ideas and preferences are strong, they can't accept the guidance of the Lord and brothers and sisters. Please be open-minded to attend the service of the church life.

Open-minded is also very important for work and research. To get people's help is actually to get time. Open-minded is necessary to learn ideas and techniques from other people and to reach the goal efficiently. When fellowshipping the Lord, if you can open your heart and fellowship without your concepts, it will be a good training of being open-minded.

Prayer: "O Lord Jesus, I need to be perfected so that I can function properly for the building. I will open to brothers and sisters who lead me. I take down my opinion and open to the guidance of the Lord. I hope to nourish people according to God, not according to my preference."