

## The Object Of Shepherding

Some years ago, an edition of the local newspaper in Camden, Maine, the *Herald*, went to print with a very noticeable mistake. It involved two photos on one of the pages: one of Camden's board of selectmen and town manager; the other of a flock of sheep. Unintentionally the captions were reversed. Under the picture of the sheep the caption identified, left to right, the town officials; the one under the photo of the town leaders' grouped around a table read, "The Sheep Fold — naïve and vulnerable, they huddle together for security against the uncertainties of the outside world." This was a most humorous error, but it expressed a humbling reality that characterizes Christians living in this world.

On one occasion Jesus was confronted by the grumbling of the scribes and Pharisees. They were complaining about Jesus meeting and eating with sinners. Jesus then illustrated His mission among these sinners through a comparable story about a shepherd with one hundred sheep. The story began with a "what would you do" kind of question. He said, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?" Upon finding the straying sheep the shepherd is said to be rejoicing, and calling friends and neighbors to rejoice with him. Then the shepherd says, "Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost." Then Jesus explained the parable as meaning that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance," Luke 15:1-7. In the mind of the Lord, He saw people as sheep. When He fed the 5000, the Bible says He saw these people as "sheep without a shepherd," Mark 6:34.

What a pleasure it is for the Christian to know that he is not alone in the world. David said, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. . ." Psalm 23:4. The Lord is with us, Matthew 28:20; John 14:18. We know we are not alone.

Jesus knew the need for a personal touch. He set in order the things concerning the church and its need for help in time of trouble. The object the Lord has in mind for Shepherds, or elders as we commonly refer to them, is so that human connection can be experienced by the lonely and struggling saint. That is why James said that, "if you are sick call the elders of the church," James 5:14. He knew His sheep not only needed spiritual and providential care, but they also needed physical, hands-on care, which could be brought about through the shepherds of the church who were watching over them.

As certain as a parent is aware of the need their newborn baby has for nurturing and hands-on care, such could be said of the church member's need for caring leaders who serve in the role of elder. As certain as a baby is able to sense security from the provision of his parents, so should the church sheep sense security from their shepherds. Just as fighting parents destroy the feeling of safety among children in the home, elders who act irresponsibly, divisively, or uncaringly crush the sense of refuge the church is meant to provide sheep in a topsy-turvy world.

If you took a picture of the church family at Buford and put it on the bulletin board, a good caption would be, "The Sheep Fold — naïve and vulnerable, they huddle together for security against the uncertainties of the outside world."

—Scott

**Note:** *You play a valuable part in the process of elder selection in this congregation. Do you know of men in this church who are already shepherding people in the congregation through their daily walk of Christian living? The elders have asked you to submit their names for consideration of serving in the office of elder. This Wednesday is the last day for submission. Think about it, pray about it, and if you know someone who would make a good shepherd, be sure to get a form and submit it today. If you need to study more on the subject, the elders have provided some in-depth study material at the Welcome Center.*