

The Flock's Responsibilities to their Shepherd

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Introduction:

People that make up the local church are called "the flock" in Acts 20:28. Pastors (shepherds) are given the awesome responsibilities to feed, guard, lead and care for the sheep God has put into their care and oversight.



We tend to focus on **The Shepherd's Responsibilities to the Flock** (and I have a message by that title as well), but this biblically-based study will highlight **The Flock's Responsibilities to Their Shepherd**. (Please take the time in personal study to look up all the references listed that are not printed out here.)

When these responsibilities are practiced – the Lord is glorified, the church goes forward, the pastor and his family are greatly encouraged, the church experiences tremendous unity, and individual members are blessed for their obedience in these vital areas.



Serving for 23 years as the pastor of two flocks (over 12 years in Queens, New York City and nearly 11 years in Sun Prairie, WI), I know from personal experience how wonderful it is when these responsibilities are fulfilled by the flock, and how devastating, damaging and divisive it can be when these same responsibilities are ignored, shirked and violated. May all of you see your personal responsibilities and fulfill them by the grace of God and for the glory of God.

1. The Flock Has Been Given The Imperative To Respectfully Esteem Their Pastor

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves." 1st Thessalonians 5:12 and 13

The two key verses above should be memorized by every church member in our Bible-believing churches! There are 3 things church members need to know about their pastors: know their labor (most pastors work more hours than church members see and know about); know their God-given and God-called role as overseers (a place of

authority established by God); and know that they are serving you (admonishing you, edifying you, praying for you, counseling you, preparing messages for you, etc.).

“Esteem them very highly in love” certainly does not mean that we set up altars in our homes to our pastor! This is not advocating the exaltation of a man. Worship is to be given only to the triune God! An example of the humility needed in the ministry is found in the story of Paul and Barnabus ministering in Lystra. (Please read Acts 14:8-18) Because of a miraculous healing of a man lame from his mother’s womb, the crowd gave the names of gods to Paul and Barnabus and were going to sacrifice oxen in their honor and lay garlands at their feet! Verses 14 and 15 say, “Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:”. These godly and humble missionaries refused their worship. James 4:6 tells us, “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

Two extremes have been practiced by members of the flock: many “pedastalize” their under-shepherd, but more often many more pulverize their pastor. Some folks have become caught up in an almost cult-like hero worship of their pastor. When this happens it is usually because the pastor relishes the limelight and encourages (by his attitude) the adulation. “Pedastalizing” comes in a distant second, however, to pulverizing men of God. Too often folks get together for a meal and have “roast preacher.” Pastors should always be open to constructive suggestions and even Spirit-filled criticism (when it is done to their face), but more often than not God’s people (when acting carnally) backbite their pastor to others, constantly look for his faults and rail on their pastor with carnal, picky criticism. Please note two other verses that support the truth of respectfully esteeming God’s men because of their office, and for their work’s sake: I Timothy 5:1 and 17.



2. The Flock Has Been Given The Mandate To Faithfully Follow Their Pastor



“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Hebrews 13:7

Note Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:1: “Be ye followers of me, **even as I also am of Christ.**” (Emphasis mine) Paul was not trying to get “The Apostle Paul cult”

going! In fact, he rebukes the Corinthian church in 1st Corinthians 3:1-7, for dividing into personality camps. There is so much truth in those 7 verses that deserves more time, but I'll simply make the main points found in this Corinthian passage:

- Strife, envy and division between believers is carnality;
- Men of God are but ministers God chooses to use for His glory;
- Some plant, others water, but it is always God Who brings the increase and it is God Who should always get the glory.

We had the joy of being invited in Wisconsin to observe large flocks of sheep at the ranch of one of the members. Donna and I rode on an all-terrain vehicle with the husband while his wife (the shepherdess) called to the sheep. About two hundred sheep from three different areas all began immediately to converge in a line behind this lady as she led them to a new, green pasture. They knew her voice, and followed her. I Peter 5:2-4: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." This passage is clear that the pastor is not to lord over God's heritage! (He is not the Chief Shepherd!) The pastor is not to have the spirit of a dictator, acting as if the church is his church! Pastors are to be servant-leaders and must acknowledge Christ as the Head of His Church. Following in Hebrews 13:7 does not mean following blindly—like those who followed Jim Jones in Guyana, South America, when they drank of the poisoned drink. Do not follow blindly, but follow your pastor's example and faith. Also, remember your pastor is not sinless and will not be the perfect example only Christ can be!

3. The Flock Has Been Given The Command To Submissively Obey Their Pastor

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Hebrews 13:17

This third responsibility will be met with resistance and opposition by some! Yet, with all positions of responsibility and leadership, God has also given those people **authority**. (Husband – in marriage [Ephesians 5]; parents – in the home [Ephesians 6]; government leaders/ police –etc. – in the nation [Romans 13]; and the pastor's leadership in the church –here in Hebrews 13:17)



Hebrews 13:17 makes two strong points:

- *Members who do not submit to this leadership are a grief to their pastor, not a joy!*
- *Remember, you give an account for yourself at the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:12) , but the pastor has to give an account for the whole flock!*

It has already been stated from 1st Peter 5 that the pastor is not to have a dictatorial spirit. Yet, God has called these men of God to lead the flock of God and given them oversight of the local church. (1st Timothy 3:1-7 give the qualifications of the bishop. The word bishop, means “overseer.”) A submissive spirit follows the filling of the Spirit. A rebellious attitude (whether from a child, teenager or adult) is a sign that there is not a spirit surrendered to God—our ultimate authority. When we put ourselves under God’s authority, it is much easier to submit to lesser authorities that He has placed over us!

Ephesians 5

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

4. The Flock Has Been Given The Responsibility To Diligently Work With Their Pastor

Ephesians 4

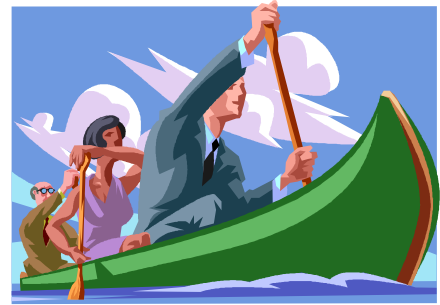
11 “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

The pastor should not be viewed as the “paid professional” brought in to do all the work of the ministry in the local church! We are all to do God’s work. We are all “ministers” according to these two passages—1st Corinthians 3:5-9 and 2nd Corinthians 5:18-20. When you study those passages, you will see that Paul was treating everyone

in Corinth the same. No one is exempt from service to God in the local church. We are all to minister to one another, and we are all to be active in the Great Commission (Mark 16:15 says, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”) Church is not a “one-man show”—but, is a team effort. Look again back at Ephesians 4:16, and you will see clearly that the local church (here compared to the body with its many parts and joints) does not work effectively and will not be spiritually edified unless every part of the body is doing his or her part!



5. The Flock Has Been Given The Obligation To Financially Support Their Pastor

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.” 1st Timothy 5:17, 18 “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” Galatians 6:6

Philippians 4:13-19 is a wonderful passage that explains giving to the Lord’s servants and the spiritual and material rewards that come from a giving spirit. The verse in Galatians 6:6 uses the word, “communicate.” We would assume that to mean our talking back and forth with our pastor and others who teach us. Let’s compare Scripture with Scripture for a moment: Philippians 4— v. 13 “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. 14 **Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.** 15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, **no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.** 16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. 17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. 18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. 19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (I have used bold and underline to emphasize these words.) When you examine this clear passage, now we know that Galatians 6:6 is saying—(this is a Lowery paraphrase) “Those who are taught the Word of God should financially support the man who teaches them good things.”

Paul wrote Philippians from a prison cell. Verse 15 is sad, because Paul had ministered in many places all over Asia Minor and into Europe, and only the Philippian

church sent gifts to meet his needs. Paul had learned contentment (verse 11), and had been hungry and full (verse 12), and was not greedy for their gifts. (v. 17a) In our materialistic age, pastors (and all those in the ministry—assistant pastors, evangelists, missionaries, etc.) need to not be “greedy of filthy lucre” (1 Timothy 3:3). Paul taught the Philippian believers three vital, spiritual lessons in this passage:

1. When you give to the financial needs of those in ministry, the Lord will reward by giving you fruit in your spiritual & eternal bank account. (Philippians 4:17)
2. Giving to the needs of those in ministry is a sweet-smelling sacrifice accepted by God, and pleasing to God. (Philippians 4:18)
3. Philippians 4:19 is a wonderful promise that Christians quote all the time when in need. Now you see the context. Because these believers cared for the needs of Paul and sent their gifts to him “once and again,” they could be assured that God was going to supply their needs also.

So much could be said regarding the pastor’s pay package. Let me make these suggestions: the pastor’s package should be, at least, the medium salary and benefits of that of the church membership; it should be the goal of the church to have the pastor on full-time salary so he can devote all of his attention and energy to prayer, the preparation of messages, the flock, and outreach to the lost (there are, of course, small churches that can only give a partial salary, if any at all—but this should be the goal); raises should at least cover cost-of-living increases; and consideration should be given for funding of insurances, retirement benefits, pastoral conferences and continued ministerial training and enrichment. It is also highly advisable for the pastor and wife to own their home. There are two strong reasons for this: equity from home ownership, and security for the pastor’s wife and family in the event of the pastor’s death. Again, pastors are not to be greedy for money (1 Timothy 3:3), but church members should not be ungenerous in their attitudes and actions toward the support of their pastor. Maybe you have heard this said, “We’ll keep the pastor poor with a meager salary, so God will keep him humble!” Sorry, but that is a very unbiblical and ungodly attitude toward the man of God.

6. The Flock Has Been Given The Duty To Biblically Communicate With Their Pastor

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

Ephesians 4:30-32

These two passages are so vital to communication in the home, in the church, and between pastor and church member. (And now “communicate” has the standard meaning of communicating in our current usage of that word!) There is no perfect church and no perfect pastor! There will be times that you will be offended by something your pastor says or does, or you might strongly disagree with some decision he has made for the church. If and when that happens, do not grieve the Holy Spirit by speaking evil of the pastor to other folks in the church. If you believe your pastor has been “overtaken in a fault,” it is your biblical duty to go to him directly (as you would any other Christian). However, note the details of Galatians 6:1: you need to be spiritual (be right with God yourself, walking in the Spirit, have all known sin confessed, have the right intentions, etc.) and have a spirit of meekness. Galatians 6:1 will absolutely backfire if you speak to anyone in anger and are not speaking to them with the goal of helping them.

There are times that I have had to ask the forgiveness of church members for something I said to them or did to them. Sometimes the sincere apology was for forgetting an appointment or for some other neglect on my part. You may find after talking with your pastor that they did not do what they did intentionally to hurt you. It is vital that you talk things out together. Get on the same page. Speak the truth in love and come away from your talk with your pastor knowing that the problem is resolved. Let me say this to church members: Pastors are always “on display” because they are seen on the platform, in the lobby, etc. and are constantly being observed. Aren’t you glad that is not true of you?! Men of God are to be examples to the flock, they are to be filled with the Spirit, and they are to be role models; however, they are also human and they have their own personalities, and they will make mistakes like everyone else in the church. Let them be themselves.

A church member can get his or her “nose bent out of shape,” and instead of handling the offense biblically, they become angry and even malicious in their words and actions toward the pastor. Paul had an interesting list of destructive sins in 2nd Corinthians 12:20: “For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths (angry tempers), strifes, backbitings (slanders), whisperings (gossip), swellings (arrogance), tumults (disturbances):” To backbite the pastor, spread gossip about him and do what you can to hurt his ministry is ungodly, carnal and divisive. So many church problems are caused by the tongue (James 3:1-12). Our fleshly arrogance, temper and gossip can cause great disturbance in the church—simply because we do not calm down, ask for wisdom and grace, and do not think and act biblically! Christian friend, do not be guilty of spreading discord among the brethren, because God looks at that as an abomination! (See Proverbs 6:16-19) The goal is to always have peace in the church. (Ephesians 4:3 says, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”) All eight responsibilities in this message are important, but this is probably the

biggest violation in our churches—not communicating biblically with the pastor. If there is a problem that you have personally with your pastor now, resolve it!

7. The Flock Has Been Given The Privilege To Prayerfully Uphold Their Pastor

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;” Ephesians 6:18



Praying for other believers is called intercession, or intercessory prayer. We need to pray “for all saints” as it says here in Ephesians 6:18, but especially for those believers who we know and love. If anyone needs your prayers, it is your pastor and the other pastors you know from other churches. Paul often requested prayer for himself. I Thessalonians 5:25 is one example: “Brethren, pray for us.” Donna and I send out our prayer letter three or four times a year by bulk mail and e-mail. We send the letter to over 250 people through the USPS, and our newsletter e-mail list is approaching 1,000! We covet the prayers of God’s people who we have met across this land since beginning our itinerant ministry in September of 2002. We have a Prayer Requests page on our website that we update monthly. Believe me, we sense the prayers of God’s people!

Satan has painted a bulls’ eye on the back of every preacher! Our adversary targets those in the ministry because of their influence and impact on others. Have you ever considered that you are sinning when you fail to pray for others as you should? I believe that 1st Samuel 12:23 and 24 send us all a very serious message: “Moreover as for me, **God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you:** but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.” (Emphasis mine) Would God be blessing more in our churches if more members were praying for their pastors? Let me give you a suggested prayer list for your pastor and the pastors, assistant pastors, evangelists and missionaries you know:

- ❖ For them to be filled with the Spirit and walk in the Spirit on a daily basis
- ❖ That the Lord would empower them for service, and use them mightily
- ❖ That they would seek God’s wisdom, grace and strength daily
- ❖ That God would put a hedge of protection around their marriages & families, and would help them to remain morally pure
- ❖ For them to have guidance in sermon preparation and that their preaching would be Spirit-filled, biblical and practical, and well received by their audiences
- ❖ That they would balance their time between ministry, marriage and family
- ❖ That they would remain joyful in the hard times and be an example to the flock

8. The Flock Has Been Given The Ministry To Regularly Encourage Their Pastor

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Hebrews 3:13 "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Galatians 6:10 "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Philippians 2:3 and 4

The great prophet of the Old Testament, Elijah, went through a time of severe discouragement in 1st Kings, chapter 19. He was despairing of life. Jezebel had him on the run and he felt all alone. He sat under a juniper tree and asked God to take his life. Listen, Christian friend—church member, pastors today can have those same juniper tree moments! The pressures, the problems in the church, the criticism, the sense of failure in the ministry, financial strain, personal problems—all of these can weigh heavily on the man of God. Praise God for the end of the story in 1st Kings 19, when God speaks to Elijah in a still small voice and lets him know that there are still seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal.



The Apostle Paul faced his times of discouragement as well. 2nd Corinthians 1:8 says, "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:". Preachers need (like King David in 1st Samuel 30:6) to encourage themselves in the Lord when they are down, and they need to stay positive and count their blessings. But, there is nothing like a word of encouragement from other believers!

God will encourage his preachers, but it also the role of every believer to exhort other believers. I have listed just four verses from Hebrews, Galatians and Philippians. Many more verses could be cited that tell us to encourage and admonish one another in the things of the Lord. Do all you can to encourage your pastor! Do kind, loving things for him and his family – cheer him on! Remember his dear wife too. Make sure they get away on dates. Make sure they get family time and vacations. Acts of sincere, Christ-like kindness will go a long way in charging their batteries for continued service for Christ.