

Devotional Thoughts :: The marks of a true shepherd -pink

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The marks of a true shepherd

(Arthur Pink, Studies in the Scriptures, May, 1939)

How diligently should they scrutinize their motives, who think of entering the ministry; for thousands have abused this Divine institution through love of ease, desire for authority and reputation, or love of money--and brought upon themselves "greater damnation" (James 3:1). Thousands have invaded the pastoral office in an unauthorized manner, to fleece sheep rather than feed them, robbing Christ of His honor and starving His people.

Solemn beyond words is it to observe how sternly our Lord denounced these false shepherds of His day. (Matthew 23) As J. C. Ryle rightly said, "Nothing seemed so offensive to Christ as a false teacher of religion, a false prophet, or a false shepherd. Nothing ought to be so much feared by the Church, be so plainly rebuked, opposed and exposed."

What are the marks of a true shepherd, how are God's people to identify those called and qualified by Him to minister unto His people?

First, the genuine pastor has the doctrine of Christ on his LIPS. The ministers of the new covenant are described as those who had "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness." Christendom today is infested with men who are full of deceit and hypocrisy, trimming their sails according to whatever direction the breeze of public opinion is blowing.

"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God." (2 Cor. 4:2). The true servant of Christ holds back nothing which is profitable, no matter how unpalatable it may be unto his hearers. He is one who magnifies not himself, nor his denomination, but Christ--His wondrous Person, His atoning blood, His exacting claims.

Second, the genuine pastor has the Spirit of Christ in his HEART. It is the Spirit who opens to him the mysteries of the Gospel, so that he is "the faithful and wise servant" (Matt. 24:45). It is the Spirit of Christ who gives him a love for His sheep, so that it is his greatest delight to lead them into the green pastures of His Word. It is the Spirit of Christ who enables him to use "great boldness of speech" (2 Cor. 3:12), so that he shuns not to declare all the counsel of God. It is the Spirit of Christ who makes him to be "prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). It is the Spirit of Christ who gives efficacy to his ministry, making it fruitful according to the sovereign pleasure of God.

Third, the genuine pastor has the example of Christ in his LIFE, which is a conforming of him to the image of his Master. It is true, sadly true, that there is not one of them who does not fall far short both of the inward and outward image of Christ. Yet there are some faint tracings of His image visible in all His true servants. The image of Christ is seen in their words, spirit, actions; otherwise we have no warrant to receive them as God's servants.

Find a man (no easy task today!) who has the doctrine of Christ on his lips, the Spirit of Christ in his heart, and the example of Christ in his life--and you find one of His genuine ministers--all others are but "thieves and robbers."