

How Can We Identify a True Minister of God? (Part 1)

Rick Railston

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Well, it's no secret because it's been blasted all over the news, and all of us recoil in horror at what many Catholic priests have done to young, innocent children over decades and decades—centuries actually—with the knowledge that the hierarchy of that church tolerated it and covered it up; we all recoil at that. It's something that obviously should never have been done and should never have been tolerated.

The ministry of God's Church has also had a checkered past in various areas. I became a deacon in 1969 and an elder in 1974, and I stopped counting at about twenty-five different ministers over the decades. Some ministers were really converted and dedicated, sacrificing themselves and in some cases their health to serve God's people. Sadly there were others who were not very converted, frankly, but I also learned a lot from them, thinking that this is not the way to do it so you learn from those examples too. As maybe has happened to many of you, some of them hurt me very deeply. Some of you have been hurt very deeply over the years.

In that regard, to one extent or another, when we talk of the people, the brethren in the Pacific Church of God, we sometimes think of the walking wounded because we've all had negative experiences from the hierarchy of the Church in years past. Sadly, by the conduct of some ministers, some brethren have come to disrespect the ministry. Some brethren have come to distrust the ministry and some are actually scared of the ministry. I know that's true in the Catholic Church, and in God's Church, even today, there are some people who are still scared of the ministry, and as a result they find it hard to open up and bear their heart to a minister because of what's happened in the past.

The fact is, we shouldn't be surprised, because it was prophesied 2,500 years ago—this is not a surprise to God; it's not that Satan came in and tripped God up or surprised Him somehow.

Let's go to Ezekiel 34. You know where I'm going and we're going to begin in verse 2. God knew that this was going to happen and God has allowed it for His ends and for His purposes. I'll read out of the King James unless otherwise noted.

Ezekiel 34:2 *“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, [we are spiritual Israel, so this obviously applies to physical Israel and spiritual Israel] prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God [Jehovah] unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? (KJV)*

That's a good question that's going to come into play later: Should the shepherds feed themselves, or should they feed the sheep?

4) The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. (KJV)

How many times did we hear “ruling with a rod of iron”? I’ve personally witnessed each one of these condemnations more than once and they continue to this day. One minister said in his own words, referring to a friend of mine and a brother in the Church, “I ran him off.” When I asked this minister, where’s my friend, he replied, “I ran him off”, as though that’s some kind of badge of honor.

5) And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: [no one there to take care of them] and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. (KJV)

They were very vulnerable when they were scattered; there was no shepherd around and therefore they become vulnerable and food for those who would devour them. We know who wants to devour us.

6) My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. (KJV)

The word “scattered” here is mentioned three times for emphasis. This scattering continues to this day, as we all know; it’s not a secret. Today there are quite a few brethren who are still wandering; they’re searching from group to group to group; they’re still seeking a shepherd or shepherds who will feed them and take care of them, or not run them off or not abuse them, where they don’t have to worry about somebody coming after them.

We’ve talked before about the fact that it’s hard to have an accurate image of God when we’ve had a bad example of a father. So it is also hard to have an accurate image of a true, godly minister if we’ve had bad experiences in the past; it colors our image of what a minister is or should be. For the benefit of those who have been hurt and for everyone else’s benefit, we need to answer the question and frankly it’s a question that I personally had to sort out, starting about fifteen to twenty years ago, of asking myself what does God expect from one of His ministers, seeing all the variety that we’ve seen. So let’s see today what the Bible says about a true minister of God, not what our past has been, not what our preconceptions are, but what the Bible actually says about a true minister of God.

Frankly, the Bible is very clear; there’s no ambiguity in the Bible about what a true minister of God should be and how that minister should behave. Frankly, for years these teachings have been ignored by all too many. This is going to be a two-part

sermon; the first part is today and it's basically, how can we identify a true minister of God? How can we identify that person?

1. For clarity's sake, let's look at the definition of the word *minister*.

The word for “minister” is Strong's #1249 and it's the Greek word *diakonos*—we obviously get the English word “deacon” from that. In the King James, *diakonos* is rendered thirty-one times; it's translated “minister” twenty of those times, “servant” eight times and “deacon” three times. Strong's has this definition: an attendant, a waiter at table or in other menial duties. The root word is interesting for *diakonos*; it means “to run errands”. Today we would say that the word means a worker who serves—as an attendant, somebody looking after other people. So in that sense, elders and deacons are both ministers and servants, obviously the deacon serving in more physical matters, the elder serving in more spiritual matters. Let's go to Matthew 20:25; I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation [from an older, online version]. Jesus called the disciples together because He had some very important information to tell them.

Matthew 20:25 *But Jesus called them together and said [this is important because He was going to be gone soon and He wanted to tell them what their job was going to be and how they should approach their job], “You know that in this world kings are tyrants and officials lord it over their people beneath them. 26) But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant [the King James says “minister”; the Greek in both cases is *diakonos*], 27) and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. [Why did He say that?] 28) For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others and to give My life as a ransom for many.” (NLT)*

What a concept—He's saying, I came here to serve others. I didn't come here to be aggrandized, I didn't come here to be put on a pedestal, to be put in a spotlight, I came here to get down in the trenches and serve other people. But in the tradition and the culture of the Worldwide Church of God that many of us grew up in, and certainly in the '60's and '70's, men coveted ordination to the ministry—coveted it, sought it, politicked for it because it was a road to power, it was a road to authority, and it was a road to respect, although they didn't realize that respect is earned, it's not given. They thought that by being ordained, they could gain in power and authority and respect, and obviously we know today these motives are wrong, they are self-serving, they aggrandize the self.

The bottom line is (as Christ's example shows us) a minister is a servant, first to God, our Father—Christ came to serve His Father, to do His Father's will, to serve the brethren, as we've talked about so many times—then, as we're going to see, as a shepherd to the brethren, to lead them in the right way and toward the correct goal.

An ordination to being an elder or deacon used to be called, and quite often was called (as if a horn was being blown), “raised in rank”—that was the point of the ordination. No, that’s not the point at all, that should never have been the point, because rank is not important, and we had so many artificial ranks in the Church that it was extreme sometimes. The fact is, ordination to the position of an elder or a deacon is an ordination to greater service, not greater grandeur. It’s an ordination to greater sacrifice, to give of the self to God, to serve the brethren. It is not to elevate the self, and frankly, we got it backwards for decades.

To make that point, I came across something this week that just blew my mind; my jaw was down in my lap. I’m going to read to you a blasphemous piece of an announcement, or quotes, rather, from the Catholic Church and where they place priests—men. This is from three different sources: A book called The Faith of Millions, by John O’Brien (he’s got so many letters after his name, I won’t bore you with reading them); a book called Nihil Obstat, by T.E. Dillon Sensor; and another book called Imprimatur, by John Francis Noll, D.D. This is what the Catholics believe and what is being said about the priesthood, despite all of the news. This is what boggles the mind:

It is a power [in context, the power of a priest] greater than that of monarchs and emperors. It is greater than that of saints and angels. It is greater than that of seraphim and cherubim. Indeed it is greater even than the power of the Virgin Mary. For while the blessed Virgin was the human agency by which Christ became incarnate a single time [notice this next sentence], the priest brings Christ down from heaven and renders Him present on our altar as the eternal Victim for the sons of man, not once, but a thousand times!

So this is saying that every time they do sacraments at mass, the priest brings Christ down. It doesn’t say Christ comes down, it says the priest brings Christ down, as a victim, multiple times. [For a rebuttal to that doctrine, see Hebrews 10:10, 12-14.] We haven’t even gotten to the worst part yet:

The priest speaks and lo! Christ the Eternal and Omnipotent God bows His head in humble obedience to the priest’s command.

Can you imagine? What an exaltation of an organization and men, and we know the Bible talks about people speaking great things against God—this is about as bad as it gets. Going on,

Of what sublime dignity is the office of the Christian priest who is thus privileged to act as the ambassador and the vicegerent [an earthly representative] of Christ, on earth! He continues the essential ministry of Christ; he teaches the faithful with the authority of Christ; he pardons the penitent sinner with the power of Christ [in the confessional]; he offers up again the same sacrifice of adoration and atonement which Christ offered

on Calvary. No wonder that the [Latin] name which spiritual writers are especially fond of applying to the priest is that of *Alter Christus*. For the priest is and should be another Christ.

This is current writing—this wasn't written five hundred or 1,000 years ago—this was written in the last few years. Here is a priest who is above the congregation, being praised for giving orders to Jesus Christ to humbly obey, and all I can say is this great whore is in for a very difficult time ahead, after that. Let's set that aside.

The Worldwide Church of God, in our history, had it backwards regarding a minister's job description. The Catholics take it far, far down the road, but I can remember, back in the '60's and '70's, the pastor would roll up in front of the church building and this small army of people would come out, grab his children, grab his belongings, escort him and his wife up to the proper seats and sit them down, and the same held true when it was time to leave. Ministerial trainees back in those days would come out from Ambassador College; they mowed lawns, washed cars, cleaned homes, and if they were married, their wives did all of that for the ministers, and they basically acted as personal servants, in many cases, for the ministry.

Too often the minister was there to be served, not to serve, and sadly that was our culture. There were many ministers who refused to do that and I applaud them; they just didn't want it, they didn't want to get close it. But there were too many that used it fully. One would hope that over time we've learned from this.

Have you heard of Hegel's Paradox? It says, "We learn from history that we learn nothing from history", and isn't that the truth—we keep repeating the same errors over and over and over again. We should all learn from the past, and when we have a chance, we want to get it right. We don't want to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. The bottom line is, as we close out point one, ministers are servants—first of God, and then of the brethren whom God has called. Serve God the Father, Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, and then serve the brethren whom God has called.

Let's go to the second point.

2. To a minister, God and Christ must absolutely come first, then the brethren.

The brethren come next in order, not the self, not an organization, not an administration, not a headquarters—God, Christ, then the brethren. Of course God and Christ come first, but the brethren are next and should be next. This has not always been the case and even today it's not always the case.

In the past we had a culture of—what did we put first?—the work. Everything was sacrificed to do the work. People were sacrificed, attention was sacrificed, time and energy were sacrificed to do a work, when actually if you look at it from God's perspective, what has God given the Church on earth down through the ages? Not wealth, not possessions; He has given us people—the brethren. They are the wealth of

the Church, they are the core of the Church, and shame on us if we don't take care of those whom God has given us. The prime gift is the one whom He calls—individual by individual by individual—and what a gift that is to the Church. Therefore, God first, Christ second, and then the brethren—not a headquarters. I remember I moved out here in 1976 or '77. I asked of the minister who was here, what do you want me to do? He replied, point the people to me and then I'll point them to headquarters. Okay, well, where are God and Christ in all of this?

With all too many, the first priority in this hierarchy was to play up to and serve a man, or serve a corporation, or serve an administration, and the brethren were way down on the list somewhere. I don't care whether it was setting up stands for Plain Truth magazines, or whether it was organizing work parties to send money in to do this or that, but to actually take care of the brethren was down on the list. Let's go to Colossians 1:7 and see where our priorities ought to be. Paul viewed himself as a servant as evidenced by this one scripture.

Colossians 1:7 *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant ...* (KJV)

So Paul was saying that Epaphras was a fellow servant like he was.

7 continued) *... who is for you a faithful minister of [whom?] Christ;* (KJV)

Christ is head of the Church—a *faithful minister of Christ*. Paul didn't say, Epaphras is for you a faithful minister of Paul or Peter or any of the apostles. He didn't say, we've got this church corporation that collects all of these tithes, that's what you're the minister of, or any such thing. All of the elders everywhere should keep this in mind—in the forefront of our minds—that we are here to serve God, we're here to serve Christ, and then we're here to serve the brethren.

I know all of the elders and deacons in the Pacific Church of God, and we try our very best to put the brethren before ourselves. We try our very best to put God first and honor the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He died for every one of us, by name, individually. Then, we must serve the brethren God has given us. None of us is perfect, but we strive to serve. Let's go to Romans 12:1; Paul is talking to the brethren but it applies so much more to a minister. Paul is starting us off by saying, look, I am beseeching you.

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, [he's talking to the brethren but knowing what we know—and we'll see more about the ministry as we go through—it applies even more to a minister] holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.* (KJV)

The New Living says, of that last phrase, “when you think about what He has done for you, is it too much to ask?” Meaning, Christ died for all of us; is it too much to ask us to be a living sacrifice on His behalf, on God's behalf? Therefore, a godly minister must be

willing to sacrifice his time, his energy, his resources, even his life to serve the brethren because that is the example Christ set for all of us.

Let's look at a third point.

3. What is the work of a godly minister? To help complete the brethren.

What does that mean, complete the brethren? Let's go to Colossians 1:25. If you put it in one sentence, the work of the ministry is to help complete the brethren. Colossians 1:25 explains that and expounds on that.

Colossians 1:25 *Whereof I am made a minister [the Greek is diakonos], according to the dispensation [the Greek means "stewardship"] of God which is given to me for you [this ministry is given to me for your benefit], to fulfil the word of God; (KJV)*

He goes on to explain:

26) Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27) To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; [what is the mystery?] which is Christ in you, (KJV)

That had never been preached prior to Christ's coming. Remember, in John 14, right before Christ was taken that night, He said, We will come and make Our abode in you. What a concept—to have God and Christ live in us. That had never even been talked about or considered. It's a mystery and it is the incredible blessing.

27 continued) ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28) Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we [referring to the ministry] may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: (KJV)

The King James translates it *perfect*, and the Greek word for perfect is Strong's #5046, meaning, "complete in growth, complete in mental and moral character". That is the goal of a minister, to help the brethren become complete in growth, to the stature and fullness of Jesus Christ, and also complete in their mental character, in their moral character. We're going to discuss as we go through this today (and a week from today) that there are a lot processes that go into making that happen but that is the overall goal.

To help someone be complete, you have to have a relationship with them. For a minister to help brothers and sisters be complete, you have to know them, you have to know who they are, you have to spend time with them. You can't help complete somebody you are ignoring. You can't help complete somebody you look down upon. You can't help complete somebody you are abusing—doesn't happen. To fulfill this, the

minister, the brethren, and each individual brother or sister have to have a relationship of mutual honor, mutual respect, and be able to communicate honestly and openly so that, when necessary, the minister can help complete the brother or sister. That is the purpose.

A godly minister must have a loving, personal, respectful relationship with the brethren—mutually respectful, and you can't do that, like we read of the Catholic Church, if the person is way up here and every time he speaks he's on some elevated platform looking down on the people, and he doesn't really mix with the people, doesn't really talk with the people, doesn't really know the people—how can that happen? It can't. The goal is to help brethren, help all of us, really, to attain the Kingdom. Paul said that very plainly. Let's go to 1 Thessalonians 2:19. Paul is saying this is my goal; this is what I want to do; this is why I am here on earth; this is why I've been called; this is why God ordained me as an apostle; this is my purpose.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 [Paul says] *For what is our hope, [that's a good question] or joy, or crown of rejoicing? [He gives the answer:] Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? (KJV)*

Paul says, my goal is to have you standing there when Christ returns, complete, ready to be changed. That is his goal, that should be the goal of every minister, I don't care what group, down through history, it makes no difference—that should be the goal.

4. If the brethren are to be made complete, they must be fed.

That's just axiomatic; one follows the other. If the brethren are to be made complete they must be fed. Let's go to John 21:15. We're breaking into the story but this is after Christ's resurrection. Let's look at what He feels is most important, what He wants these apostles to do.

John 21:15 *So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these [the other apostles]? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.
16) He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.
17) He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?*

Obviously Peter is feeling very uncomfortable at this point, as we all would, because you ask twice, he's answered the same twice, and you get the implication that Christ doesn't believe him; that's what I would feel.

17 continued) Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; [you know my mind, you know my heart, you know what's inside me] thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. (KJV)

Here we have, after Christ is resurrected, the apostles going out on their own, and what does He say three times? Feed my sheep. This is a direct command from Christ to the apostles. He's saying, if you love Me, you will feed My sheep. If you don't feed My sheep, that tells Me (I'm speaking for Christ) you don't love Me very much, or at all—you love something else. But, if you love Me, you're going to feed my sheep. He didn't say go do a work, He didn't say go on television or print magazines, He said feed My sheep. Now let's go to Acts 20 and we'll begin in verse 28, but the context begins in verse 17 because Paul is now speaking to a meeting of elders, but we're going to pick it up in verse 28. We're going to see here that Paul repeats the same message that Christ gave to the apostles. He wasn't there when Christ was talking, but notice God inspired the same message.

Acts 20:28 [Paul says] *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and [take heed] to all the flock, over the which the [Holy Spirit] hath made you overseers, [sometimes translated "bishops", and what are they to do?] to feed the church of God, which he [Christ] hath purchased with his own blood.* (KJV)

Here we have a direct command from an apostle to the elders. First from Christ to the apostles, now from an apostle to the elders. Now let's go to 1 Peter 5:1 and see another direct command, this time from a different apostle, but it is the same command.

1 Peter 5:1 *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*

2) [same message] *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, [because you have to] but willingly; not for filthy lucre [not for money], but of a ready mind;* (KJV)

The New International says, "but eager to serve".

3) *Neither as being lords over God's heritage, [that's what we fell into: lords over God's heritage, and he says don't do that] but being examples to the flock.* (KJV)

Here we see another direct command from an apostle to the elders. These are three different scriptures—one from Christ, one from Paul, one from Peter. These are three instances of direct commands. This is far more direct and far more clear than any command to do a work. I'm not putting down anybody who does whatever work they feel they should, but the fact is, if we don't do this then where are we? This is so clear and so direct that we cannot ignore it.

Going on with this account, feeding the flock, so to speak, feeding the brethren, Christ and the apostles often refer to the brethren as lambs or sheep. It's sad but true, that among the ministry in the past, even at the very highest levels, the brethren were called dumb sheep. I've heard it in ministerial conferences, I've had it said to me directly by high-ranking ministers, and I wish I had had the chutzpah at that time to confront them

on it but I did not; you just didn't do that back then. To hear the brethren be called dumb sheep was very disconcerting to me because I knew the brethren and the brethren weren't dumb. A lot of the brethren were much smarter than some of the ministers. Their education was better, their intelligence was sharper, they had more experience in real life, and they weren't dumb sheep.

The fact is, the term "sheep", just by itself, is not a demeaning term. It's descriptive but it's not demeaning. There's always an exception, but generally speaking sheep are gentle, they are harmonious, they are non-violent. We've heard of dog and cat fights; have you ever heard of a sheep fight? Doesn't happen, sheep don't do that—rams do that but not sheep. Generally, God's people are the same way. There are a few prickly ones out there but generally God's people are gentle and harmonious and are not violent. The fact is, sheep have to be led.

I found out firsthand you can't drive sheep. When I was a teenager, we had a neighbor who owned a fairly large cattle ranch east of El Paso, near a town called Van Horn, out in the middle of nowhere. It was rocks, gravel, mountains, jack rabbits, sagebrush and rattlesnakes, and that was pretty much it. The neighbor would use us kids; we were so eager to get on a horse and go pretend to be cowboys, that we would go out to this ranch, getting up about three in the morning. We were in the saddle at first light, and thankfully the rancher had an old cowhand who knew what he was doing.

We didn't know what we were doing, we were just doing what we were told. Old Sparky would say (he was a wizened old cowboy and had been on a horse so long his legs were indeed bowed), "You see those mountains off in the distance? Go out there, go all the way to the base of the mountains, and then bring back every sheep or cow you see." That would take all day. I found out, learning as I went, you could take a coil of rope and hit a cow in the rear, and it would jump and go where you'd want it to go; sheep, not so. In fact, in the spring runoff from the mountains, there was a creek about four feet wide and maybe a foot deep, and when we wanted the fifty or so sheep to cross it, the sheep wouldn't; they just went up to the creek and stopped. I yelled at one, whacked at another, and they just moved out of the way; it was like a bunch of cats.

So I'm up to the creek and the sheep are on either side of me, and they're just looking around, and I finally said this isn't working, so I backed off. I could see one sheep up front; it wanted to go but it wouldn't move, and then finally that one sheep jumped, and everybody just followed as if the little creek wasn't there. It taught me firsthand that sheep can be led by a shepherd, but they can't be driven by a shepherd. That doesn't work, and I think there's a reason why God calls the brethren sheep, because they are non-violent, gentle, and they need to be led.

Sheep need and will follow a shepherd who lives with them and who has a record of taking care of them, looking after them. Remember what Christ said, the sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd and sheep really do that. You can go into a pen with multiple herds of sheep from multiple other shepherds, and the one guy will yell whatever he yells to get the sheep going, and his sheep will perk up and do what he

says; they follow him out of the pen. They recognize his voice, so they must be led, not driven, and they must be fed.

This gives us an interesting parallel to the ministry. The minister needs to live among the brethren and get to know them just as a shepherd lives among the sheep. The minister needs to know what the needs of the sheep are and do his best to provide for those needs within his ability, feeding the flock and also protecting the flock. A shepherd has a rod and a staff and they are there for a reason. A minister has a spiritual rod and staff, and he needs to protect the brethren from Satan, the roaring lion that wants to devour. As a shepherd protects the sheep, a minister should protect the brethren. As a shepherd leads the sheep, a minister should lead the brethren. As a shepherd provides for the sheep, the minister should provide for the brethren. The analogy is very clear and that's why God and Christ use that analogy. Let's go to the fifth point. From the above it's clear that the fifth point is:

5. Ministers are to be shepherds.

Let's look at what David says in the obvious psalm, Psalm 23, about a shepherd. We're going to take a little digression because this is a psalm that I read over for decades, just blew right past it, and it has a whole new meaning today. David tells us, as we're going to see, who our shepherd is.

Psalm 23:1 *The LORD [YHVH, Jehovah] is my shepherd; (KJV)*

As we've talked about before, who did David worship? He worshipped the one in the Holy of Holies, and who was in the Holy of Holies—God Almighty. We know today He's God our Father.

1 continued) ... *I shall not want.*

2) *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:* [meaning the grass is there for food and He's directed me to the pasture which provides the food] *he leadeth me beside the still waters* [where I can drink and not be overwhelmed].

3) *He restoreth my soul [life]: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

4) *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: [why?] for [as a shepherd] thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (KJV)*

David is saying because the shepherd has a rod and a staff—which are sometimes defensive weapons, but we're going to see they're used for other purposes too—they are a comfort because God will defend, God will protect, God will provide.

5) *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:* [in other words, you exalt me when others are trying to kill me and destroy me—that's a promise; we need to take heart in that] *thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

6) *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD [YHVH] for ever. (KJV)*

So the first verse starts with LORD—Jehovah—is my shepherd; verse six ends with I want to dwell in the house of this same LORD forever. For years, I thought this passage referred to Jesus Christ, but whose house is the house of the LORD? Let's go to John 2:16. Christ tells us. Notice what Christ says. Christ is speaking and He is in the temple and He's not happy.

John 2:16 *And said unto them that sold doves [in the temple], Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. (KJV)*

This is the same house, of course, in which David wants to live forever. Let's go to chapter 14:2. Very familiar scripture to us—we have read this for decades—and it's absolutely true. Christ is speaking.

John 14:2 *In my Father's house [not Christ's house] are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you [in my Father's house]. (KJV)*

So we see here that Psalm 23 must refer to the Father, and God is called *my shepherd* by David. Let's go to Psalm 80:1 and see another proof that God is our shepherd. He's not the only shepherd but God is our shepherd. This is an appeal to the Shepherd of Israel.

Psalm 80:1 *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. (KJV)*

We've talked many times about who it is that dwells between the cherubim. It's God the Father, and we see here that the one *that dwells between the cherubim* is called the *Shepherd of Israel*. He led Joseph like a flock—yes, absolutely. So God the Father is the Shepherd of Israel. Christ is also a Shepherd; let's go to Zechariah 13:7. This is a verse that refers to both God the Father and Jesus Christ, and the Church has recognized this correctly for decades.

Zechariah 13:7 *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow [the Hebrew word for fellow can mean "comrade" or "kindred man"], saith the LORD of hosts:*

That can only be God the Father; we've talked about that so many times before, so the LORD of Hosts—God the Father—is talking about *my shepherd*, and He says, if you smite this shepherd, the sheep shall be scattered, and here the Father calls Christ *His* shepherd. The Church has always understood this to be God the Father calling Christ His shepherd—no argument there at all. It is logical since both work together as a team, both were involved in creation, both have worked together down through the ages, so isn't it logical that both would be called "Shepherd" because both are

concerned about the sheep whom God has called; that both want them to be in the family of God, therefore both act as Shepherds in that regard. Notice what Christ said in John 10:11; He's talking about Himself. Christ describes Himself as a Shepherd.

John 10:11 [Christ is speaking] *I am the good shepherd:* [and then He goes on to say, which we the ministry need to take heed:] *the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.* (KJV)

You can't get around that. That is part of the calling of a minister—you have to be willing to give your life as a physical sacrifice or a living sacrifice for the sheep.

I'll read verse 12 out of the New Living Translation.

12) *A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will leave the sheep because they aren't his and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock.* (NLT)

That sounds exactly like Ezekiel 34 that we read in the beginning. Let me give you a perfect example, a modern-day one. My wife and I would visit my hometown once or twice a year, and there were two churches, one in El Paso, Texas, and one in Las Cruces, New Mexico, just across the border. When we visited, we would go to Sabbath services there, and when the breakup of Worldwide occurred, the pastor in that area moved. He went to a place where he always wanted to live, apparently, and he was hired by another group. So going through this turmoil of Worldwide breaking up, the shepherd who served those churches wasn't there—he was missing in action. And the flock was scattered, just like Ezekiel 34 says, just like Christ said in John 10.

13) *The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.* (KJV)

The sheep scattered, predictably, and there isn't a couple of handfuls today in that area because of that.

14) *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.* [He says, My sheep know Me.]

15) *As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.* (KJV)

He repeats it over and over.

16) *And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold:* [yes, referring to us] *them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.* (KJV)

Christ is head of the Church, the Church being the body of Christ. So in counting the cost of being a shepherd, one must be prepared to give one's life for the brethren. Let's

go to one other scripture that I admit I just read right over for decades: 1 Peter 5:4. This is a different concept here. God and Christ are both Shepherds.

1 Peter 5:4 *And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.* (KJV)

The word for “chief Shepherd” is one word in the Greek, Strong’s #750, and the word is *archipoimén*. It’s a combination of two words, *archi* and *poimén*: *poimén* means “shepherd”, and *archi*, which is interesting, comes from Strong’s #746; it means “chief in order or rank”. Think about it—both are shepherds but if you have to have a chief shepherd, who would that be? Christ said, My Father is greater than I; Christ said, I came to do the will of My Father. So we see here, it seems apparent to me that the Chief Shepherd can only be the Father. So if God is the Chief Shepherd, and we just read that Christ is the Good Shepherd, what does that mean for all of us and what does that mean for the ministry?

All it means is the ministers are human assistants—human assistant shepherds—to the Chief Shepherd and the Good Shepherd, and we’re here to do Their will as human beings. We don’t have the spiritual power God and Christ have; we rely on Them to rescue us and provide for us, all of us, but the fact is that those in the ministry are just assistants. Remember the root word for minister means to run errands, to wait tables, to serve. That’s what we do at God and Christ’s beckoning—we’re here to fulfill that responsibility. God has given us the responsibility and the authority to do that job; that’s in the Bible. The point is we’re just assistant shepherds, to help God, as Paul pointed out, to have everyone stand when Christ returns, with a crown on their heads.

Let’s go to the sixth point.

6. Christ tells a true or godly minister how he must feed the flock.

Let’s go to 2 Timothy 4:1. Paul, as we know, was trained directly by Jesus Christ. I’m going to read this out of the New International Version so you might want to put a marker here. Notice what it says.

2 Timothy 4:1 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom [Paul says], I give you [obviously referring to Timothy] this charge:* (NIV)

Timothy is reading this epistle and Paul says, I’m giving you this charge, this is what you must do as an elder.

2) [The first charge] *Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; [then he gives the second charge] correct, [then he gives the third charge] rebuke and [then he gives the fourth] encourage ...* (NIV)

Four things, Paul is saying to this young man—this newly ordained elder—this is what you're charged with, this is what you need to be doing. So what we want to do now is look into these four charges and see what God intends for a shepherd—a minister—to do in order to feed the flock.

The first of the 4, A, if you like to outline:

6A. Preach the word.

The word “preach” is Strong's #2784, and it means “to herald as a public crier”. Back in those days, public criers would go through town and make announcements—they didn't have cell phones, public address systems and all of that. When the public crier in Old England would go through the town and make a cry that all is well, that is the reference, that is what this is referring to. Strong's says, “to herald as a public crier, especially divine truth”. As a godly minister, Timothy was given this charge: Preach divine truth—preach it, teach it, let everybody know about it. With that in mind, let's go to Titus 1 and see what Paul instructs Titus, an elder, to do. Titus and Timothy were contemporaries and Paul is talking about an overseer. The word in the King James is *bishop* but it means “overseer”.

Titus 1:7 *For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; [notice this] not selfwilled [wanting his own way], not soon angry [doesn't have a short fuse or a hair trigger], not given to wine [because that influences judgment], no striker, not given to filthy lucre [or money];*
8) *But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;*
(KJV)

Not going to extremes in any fashion. The key is verse 9.

9) *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught ...* (KJV)

Paul is talking to Titus; Paul is an apostle who taught Titus face to face, meaning eyeball to eyeball, close up—in Titus' presence. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Paul were standing here, right now, and he could teach us directly, and it was just a direct connection with Paul because he saw things we haven't seen, and he suffered things we haven't suffered, and Christ taught him directly. When he's saying here, hold fast to what you've been taught, the message Paul taught was directly what Christ taught him. There are no interpretations, there are no translations necessary, so that's why he says, hold fast, don't change anything.

9 continued) *...that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.* (KJV)

As we know, holding fast certainly didn't happen in the breakup of Worldwide, and many people didn't hold fast and are no longer around. The Old Testament warns us about this is Deuteronomy 12:32; it's a very familiar scripture. God told him to write this:

Deuteronomy 12:32 [God says, through Moses] *What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.* (KJV)

In other words, stay focused on My Word, stay focused in the Bible. Don't become sidetracked by non-salvational subjects. Sometimes it's easy to do because of interests or distractions; it's easy to major in the minors, to get off on conspiracy theories or secret organizations, or all of the things going on in some subculture somewhere. Every second we do that is a second that our nose isn't in the Bible. Ministers and brethren alike must be like the Bereans. What did the Bereans do? They eagerly listened to Paul. They trotted down to the synagogue, unrolled the scrolls and said, let's see if this guy is telling us the truth. They didn't roll up the scrolls and walk away, they eagerly listened. They proved it through the Word of God.

All of us—ministers, brethren, everybody—need to listen, not be hidebound by tradition, but listen eagerly to what the Bible has to say and then prove it out of the scriptures. It's got to be proven out of the scriptures.

A godly minister must also preach the truth regardless of the cost. At some point you have a choice to make. I can preach smooth words and keep everybody happy or I can preach the truth and let the cards fall where they may fall. Some ministers have lost their jobs for preaching the truth. This is just recently—not ten years ago, twenty years ago, or a hundred years ago—some ministers have lost their jobs in the last year because they would not alter the truth. Some ministers have lost their retirement—they've had it severed because they would not compromise speaking the truth. Still other ministers have lost parts of congregations because they had to make the decision: Do we preach the truth or do we keep everybody happy and preach smooth words and offer pabulum?

Choices have to be made, and at some point, a godly minister has to say, I'm a minister of Christ, I'm a minister of God, this is what They say. I have a choice; what am I going to do? Well, there is no choice and you don't have a choice, because you preach what God says and commands. There is no choice but to preach the truth; after that, you must have the faith that God will take care of the rest, and He always does—He always does. Ministers must preach the truth (closing out this point A) and continue to preach the truth for the rest of their lives. As long as God gives them breath and a brain and a mouth, they must continue to preach the truth.

We're running out of time, so I'm going to stop at this point. Next week we'll launch into part 2, and we'll cover points B through D of the charge that Paul gave to Timothy.