

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 Shepherding the Needy

1

Introduction

Many churches in America have lost their way. It is so easy to lose focus of what is important. Church success is not based in how many people attend or how much money is in the bank. It is not how many programs, worship teams, buildings, or the eloquence of the pastor.

When God looks at a church, it is all about how we relate to Jesus. Are we serving Christ or self. Are we here to equip each other to better serve Christ or are people here to serve programs and/or the needs of leadership.

I encourage you to read the opening chapters of Revelation as Jesus addresses the churches.

2

Introduction

Last week we looked at the responsibilities of sheep and shepherds.

Shepherds are to labor, properly exercise God given authority, and provide spiritual instruction bring God's Word to bear on the issues of life and culture.

Sheep are responsible for appreciating, esteeming, and follow the shepherd as they follow Christ.

Today we look at 5 types of needy sheep that the church need minister to: the wayward, the worried, the weak, the wearisome, and the wicked.

3

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

4

The Charge to Exhort

1 Thessalonians 5:14a

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly.

The word “**exhort**” is from *parakaleō*, which literally means “**to come alongside**” and carries the idea of providing help to someone. It is a word that is often used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Paul is addressing the **brethren** (the spiritually healthy believers) to get involved in helping the needy. Though shepherds also have the responsibility of taking care of the sheep, Paul addresses is addressing the congregation. We have a joint responsibility to be involved in each others lives to promote Christ-likeness.

5

Wayward Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14a

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly.

Paul identified the wayward by the term **unruly**. The Greek word often occurred in a military context and referred to a soldier who was out of rank and/or behaved in a disorderly, insubordinate manner. The word came to refer to anyone who did not perform his duty or follow through on his responsibility. Some commentators say that it refers to the idle or apathetic (2 Thess. 3:6–7, 11; cf. 1 Tim. 5:13), but the context suggests the term could also refer to those who had an actively rebellious attitude.

6

Wayward Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14a

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly.

The unruly were those who were out of step with the direction everyone else was headed. Everyone here who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus for salvation have been given spiritual gifts as well as other talents. God gave you these abilities to use. I believe that everyone here has been placed here by God to help and serve. Let us come beside you and help you discover your gifts and purpose. Service comes in all sorts of forms. Many of you are prayer warriors. Others help meet the financial needs of the church. I know that many of you give of you time and resources to help others in need. We do these things, not for the applause of man, but as our sacrifice to God. The point is that we should all be doing something. Let me encourage you to find your place!

7

Wayward Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14a

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly.

Helping the wayward does not involve having a degree in counseling or other specialized training. Instead, other believers are to come alongside them and warn (*noutheteō*) them. The idea is to put some sense into someone's head or alerting them of the serious consequences of their actions. Noutheteō does not mean being judgmental or critical in a superior manner. Rather, it is the caring kind of warning against danger.

Think of being a spectator and watching a race and you see a friend running but nearing exhaustion. You don't criticize, but rather encourage him to keep going and not give up. You don't have to wait for the coach to give advice, you can do this yourself.

8

Worried Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14b
comfort the fainthearted

The second group of spiritually needy sheep Paul identified was **the fainthearted**, which means literally the “**small souled**.” There are those in the church who are bold and courageous, unafraid of persecution or difficulty, and willing to put their lives on the line for a noble cause or principle of truth. In contrast, **the fainthearted** lack the boldness to accept a challenging new ministry, fear change, the unknown, and want a risk-free ministry that is traditional, safe, and absolutely secure.

9

Worried Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14b
comfort the fainthearted

Those who are confident should **comfort** the worried. **Comfort** literally means “**to speak alongside**” someone, and in so doing, to offer comfort and consolation. It can speak of coming alongside and training a person in how to do ministry. Others need confidence that God answers prayer and that they are safe and secure in Christ who loves them eternally.

10

Weak Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14c

uphold the weak

The **weak** could be those who are fragile in faith, beset by doubts (Rom. 14:1–15:13; 1 Cor. 8:1–13; 9:19–23; 10:23–33). Their faith may not be strong enough to enjoy their freedom in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:16–23). They are certainly more susceptible to error (Eph. 4:14), temptation, and sin than stronger believers (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9–13). Some weaker believers have such sensitive consciences over their past sins that they perceive things as sin that may not be sin at all (cf. 1 Cor. 8:7).

11

Weak Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14c

uphold the weak

The term **weak** also focuses on susceptibility to sin and applies to believers who struggle with abandoning sin and obeying God's will. The term weak is the same used in James 5:14 and is translated weak. "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." The morally and spiritually weak one is to call the spiritually strong elders to come and intercede for him, and whatever sin has caused the weakness, they exhort him to repent of that sin.

12

Wearisome Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14c

uphold the weak

Paul states that the church is to **uphold the weak**. Galatians 6:1-2 states “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

The term **uphold** means “to hold firmly,” “to cling to,” “to support,” “to hold up” (cf. Titus 1:9). Paul commanded the stronger sheep to come alongside the weaker sheep, establish close personal relationships with them, and provide them doctrinal instruction and encouragement toward righteousness and away from sin.

13

Weak Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:14d

be patient with all.

It is easy to become frustrated, angry, or discouraged with others. It is always disappointing in a discipling relationship when a mature believer has taught, trained, exhorted, strengthened, and encouraged a less mature believer, only to have that person manifest little commitment to Christ or evidence of spiritual growth. This is true in every church, as a result, Paul exhorted the congregation to **be patient with all**.

The church is to be **patient** (patient having both external and internal control) with those who are struggling in their faith. We all have our good and bad moments and being patient with one another comes out of love and provides unity in the church. It is Jesus who changes lives - not us.

14

Wicked Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

One of Satan's tactics is to attack from within. He used Peter to oppose Jesus and Judas to betray Him. Divisions and attacks often come from within the church and it can be painful. Paul instructs in how to respond to such wickedness from others in the church: **see that no one renders evil for evil to anyone**. It appears at some point, disobedient sheep had done **evil** (baseness, meanness, wickedness) to the obedient ones. Paul's response is a command and **that no one** should repay **evil for evil**. There is absolutely no place among Christians for retaliation or personal vengeance (Rom. 12:19). The only one who has the right to retaliate is God (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Prov. 20:22; Nah. 1:2; Heb. 10:30; Rev. 14:9–10, 14–20).

15

Wicked Sheep

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

The sheep's proper response when sinned against is not to seek revenge, but to always **pursue what is good**. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to respond to hostility with genuine acts of love. The welfare of **one another**, even those who had seriously offended them, was to be the Thessalonians' primary concern. That concern was also to extend beyond the church to **all people**.

16

So What ...

So a healthy flock is characterized by growth in faith, love, purity, and progress toward the likeness of Christ. However, there are spiritually needy sheep who need help. That means the healthy sheep must lovingly, patiently, but truthfully deal with these sheep to help move them to Christ likeness. The key is not finding some clever strategy to bypass the troubles, but addressing the issues directly, as shepherds and sheep alike admonish the wayward, encourage the worried, uphold the weak, bear with the wearisome, and render goodness to the wicked.