

How To Identify A Christian

Part 4

Part of God's Flock

If we really understand what it means to be a sheep in God's flock, we will better be able to:-

Relate to each other in a congregation.

Relate to our church leaders.

Relate to Jesus Christ.

God has through all generations looked on His people as sheep and He their Shepherd.

Psalm 80:1 [NIV] *"Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth"*

Psalm 100:3 [NIV] *"Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."*

Psalm 77:20 [NIV] *"You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."*

Psalm 78:52 [NIV] *"But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert."*

When God called David to become Israel's king, He chose an experienced shepherd.

Psalm 78:70-72 [NIV] *"He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them."*

The people of Israel saw God as their shepherd and their own leaders as "under shepherds" who received authority from God to care for His flock.

Priests and kings were looked upon as God's shepherds even though some of them were **not** faithful to "pastoral work".

Jeremiah condemned the "pastors" religious and political leaders who destroyed the flock instead of serving it.

Jeremiah 23:1-4 [NIV] *"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD."*

A warning to religious and political leaders.

Who will take the place of these unfaithful religious and political shepherds?

Jeremiah 23:5-6 [NIV] *“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”*

The “*Lord of our righteousness*” refers to Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:1 [NIV] *“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”*

Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God.

In these times of dictatorships and democracies, it is difficult for us to believe that government leaders are God’s shepherds.

There are times when some people in the office of leaders seem more like hirelings or even thieves.

John 10:1-10 [NIV] *“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

Human government is ordained by God, and we must respect those in office, even if we disagree with them.

Roman 13:1-7 [NIV] *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.”*

1 Peter 2:11-17 [NIV] *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.”*

Our responsibility is to pray for them.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 [NIV] *“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*

Pray that the decisions they make will not hinder our work of witness to those who do not know the true Creator God.

Matthew 9:35-36 [NIV] *“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

Jesus saw humans as lost sheep, without a shepherd and looked upon them with compassion.

Under the New Covenant, the Christian Church is God’s flock of sheep.

Luke 12:22-23, 32 [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.” ... “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”*

Christ’s disciples, all Christians, are His flock.

Matthew 18:10-14 [NIV] *“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”*

The little flock of God is made up of “*lost sheep*” that the Good Shepherd has rescued.

Why does God compare His people to sheep?

Sheep are “clean” animals.

This means accepted by God for sacrifice [see Old Covenant definition of “*clean animals*” in **Leviticus 11:1-8**].

Of course, no sinner is acceptable to God in himself, our acceptance comes only through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 [NIV] *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Christ’s sacrifice makes us “*right*” with God.

In contrast God likens “*un-clean*” animals like dogs and pigs with filth.

2 Peter 2:20-22 [NIV] *“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”*

Very descriptive of a person who having known God’s Grace rejects it and turns their back on God.

The nature of a creature, animal or human, determines its appetite.

It is the nature of sheep to desire green pastures and still waters rather than the garbage dump.

Sheep know their shepherd.

John 10:14 [NIV] *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me”*

The illustration that Jesus is using is the “little flock” of the Middle East shepherd of His time on earth, not the vast flocks of Australia or New Zealand.

John 10:3 [NIV] *“The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”*

The Middle East shepherd named his sheep by their individual characteristics and knew their personal needs.

John 10:3-5 [NIV] *“The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger’s voice.”*

There are many voices calling to us today, and some of them sound “religious”.

But the true child of God will not follow when he hears the voice of strangers.

God’s voice today, as our Shepherd, is the Word of God, the Holy scriptures found in the Holy Christian Bible, that is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

2 Timothy 3:16 [NIV] *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,”*

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17 [NIV] *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” ... “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” ... “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”*

Any professed “shepherd” that denies this Holy Spirit inspired Word of God is a false shepherd, a thief and a robber, and is dangerous to the flock.

Matthew 7:15 [NIV] *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”*

It is encouraging to know that Jesus Christ our Shepherd knows each of us, His sheep, personally.

Sheep desperately need a shepherd.

For the most part sheep are defenceless animals, easily frightened and easily led astray.

Unlike predatory beasts or even domestic cows and goats, sheep need someone to guide and guard them or they will get into trouble.

Jeremiah 10:23 [NIV] *“I know, O LORD, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.”*

Why is this?

We find the answer in the same book of the Christian Bible.

Jeremiah 17:9 [NIV] *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”*

Unless we follow our shepherd we will soon go astray.

1 Peter 2:25 [NIV] *“For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*

Just as the people of Israel under the Old Covenant had “*under-shepherds*” to direct the affairs of the nation so the local church under the New Covenant has pastors to give spiritual direction and protection to the flock.

Ephesians 4:11 [NIV] *“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be **pastors** and teachers,”*

The English word “*pastor*” comes from the Latin word “*shepherd*”.

The local pastor holds a responsible position before God and the people, and his ministry is not to be taken lightly.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 [NIV] *“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”*

It is not a job for a novice or for one who does not possess the qualifications given in scripture.

So long as the pastor obeys the Word and follows Jesus Christ, the sheep should follow him.

1 Corinthians 11:1 [NIV] *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”*

Hebrews 13:7, 17 [NIV] *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” ... “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*

Sheep are useful animals.

In Bible times, the shepherd did not keep a flock of sheep to slaughter them. The shepherd wanted his sheep alive since he profited from their milk, wool as well as their young.

Lambs were killed for Passover and festive family occasions and sometimes for sacrifices to God.

But for the most part, the sheep were protected as part of the family wealth.

1 Corinthians 9:7 [NIV] *“Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?”*

In return for all that Jesus Christ, our good shepherd, gives us and does for us, we as God’s sheep ought to give our very best to Him.

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Be willing to be “*living sacrifices*”.

Sheep flock together.

It is the nature of sheep to want to be within a flock.

God has placed within “*born again*” Christians a desire to spend time with other Christians.

The New Testament scripture says nothing about isolated Christian living.

The New Testament encourages Christians constantly to meet and do things together.

“*Let us*” scripture are numerous indicating that God desires His children to meet together as often as possible to support, encourage, inspire one another.

Galatians 5:25 [NIV] *“Since we live by the Spirit, **let us** keep in step with the Spirit.”*

Walk with one another in the spirit.

2 Corinthians 7:1 [NIV] *“Since we have these promises, dear friends, **let us** purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”*

How can we help each other do this?

James 5:16 [NIV] *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and **pray for each other** so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

The word translated “*sin*” means to “*miss the mark*” indicating **not** a rebellious or deliberate sin but one committed out of weakness.

Galatians 6:9-10 [NIV] *“**Let us** not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, **let us** do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

If we are doing things as a group we each seem to generate extra energy.

Philippians 3:16-17 [NIV] *“Only **let us** live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”*

Our good example in a group can encourage others to seek the same high standard.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-11 [NIV] *“So then, **let us** not be like others, who are asleep, but **let us** be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, **let us** be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, **we may live together** with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”*

As Christ died for “*us*” we need to live, work and mature as a group, that is the flock of God.

In the letter to modern-day Christians [Hebrews] we will find an additional twelve “*let us*” scriptures.

I feel God is making a very strong point about Christians doing things together as a group, just like sheep in a flock.