

How To Identify A Christian

Part 5

A Christian Looks To Jesus Christ As His Shepherd And Themselves As His Sheep

The Bible presents Jesus Christ and His shepherding ministry from three different perspectives.

1 The Good Shepherd who died for His Sheep

John 10:11-13 [NIV] *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”*

The fact that Jesus Christ lay down His life for us, His sheep, gives Him ownership of the sheep.

Acts 20:28 [NIV] *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”*

Jesus Christ owns the sheep and is in this passage of scripture instructing His under-shepherds to take great care of His sheep.

John 10:14-16 [NIV] *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”*

There are sheep whom Christ owns who are yet to be brought under the protection of the Good Shepherd.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Jesus Christ, the Only [un-created] Son of God, died for the whole world, all humanity, but as yet not all know Him as their Good Shepherd.

When Jesus called Himself a shepherd He was identifying Himself with a group of men who were, for the most part, rejected in the society of that day.

Shepherds were classified with thieves.

Pious Jews would **not** do business with shepherds.

Judges would **not** ask shepherds to give testimony in court.

In calling Himself a shepherd Jesus Christ was identifying Himself as a friend of outcasts.

Luke 5:27-32 [NIV] *“After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others*

were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Tax collectors were also classified as outcasts.

Luke 15:1-7 [NIV] “Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering round to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.” Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Christ was pointing to the Pharisees and teachers who should have acted like a shepherd towards the people, but were failing to do so.

The word “good” carries with it the idea of “noble and blameless”.

Many great men in the Old Testament were shepherds but none were “blameless” [sin free].

Under the Old Covenant sheep died for the shepherds, as sacrificial animals, but under the New Covenant the Good Shepherd died for the sheep.

As part of the flock of sheep under the care of the Good Shepherd we can have great confidence that if we do stray He will seek us out and bring us back into the flock.

Psalms 22 describes the terrible death that our Good Shepherd endured to show just how much He loves us, His sheep.

2 The Great Shepherd

As the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ perfects His sheep.

The Good Shepherd, having finished His Work of redemption is now acting as our advocate on the Throne of Grace at the right hand of God the Father.

Hebrews 4:14-16 [NIV] “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Our Great Shepherd is there at the Throne of God to supply all our needs. He is there all the time for us to call upon.

Hebrews 13:20-21 [NIV] “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd, through the work of The Holy Spirit dwelling in us, prepares us, His sheep, for a work that will bring pleasure to the Father.

The Greek word translated “equip you” is “katartitizo” often used by people in the time of the early Christian church.

To a soldier it meant “to equip an army for battle”.

To a sailor “to outfit a ship for a voyage”.

To a doctor “to set a broken bone”.

To a fisherman “to mend the nets” [Matthew 4:21]

The shades of meaning help us to understand what the Great Shepherd desires to do in our lives.

What tools does the Good Shepherd use to bring us to perfection?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 [NIV] “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

God’s written word, the Holy Christian Bible, is the major tool.

Ephesians 4:11-16 [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, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

The Holy Spirit inspired teaching and the regular fellowship in a local church is a powerful tool to bring about maturity, or perfection.

1 Thessalonians 3:10 [NIV] “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.”

Intercessory prayer brings to maturity all parties involved.

1 Peter 5:10 [NIV] “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

The Great Shepherd even uses suffering to bring His sheep to perfection.

Galatians 6:1 [NIV] “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

Each believer should make themselves available to the Great Shepherd to help bring to perfection other believers who have failed.

The purpose of any church discipline is to reclaim and restore the offender to the flock, **not** destroy them.

Remember we are being brought to maturity [perfection] to be of use to the Great Shepherd **not** to receive the praise of other humans [sheep].

Galatians 6:2-5 [NIV] “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his

own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.”

We are sheep not statues; we are supposed to be useful to the Shepherd.

The Great Shepherd wants to work in us so He can work through us to bring new lambs into His flock.

If our personal sanctification and maturing does not result in service to others and bring glory to God it is mere religious self-righteousness.

Psalm 23:6 [NIV] *“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”*

This psalm describes just what the Great Shepherd is doing in us and for us every day of our lives.

We have two great assurances stated in this psalm: *“I shall not want”* [v. 1] and *“I will fear no evil”* [v. 4].

As part of the Great Shepherd’s flock we have provision, protection, sufficiency and security.

Just like sheep we may not understand what our Great Shepherd is doing, but we know we can trust Him.

Why does the Great Shepherd do all this for us?

“For His name’s sake” [v. 3].

All the Great Shepherd does for His sheep is to bring glory to our Heavenly Father as children should to their father, the one who has given them life.

Romans 8:28 [NIV] *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

Paul understood the reason for our calling and the loving care we received from our Creator Father God.

Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14 [NIV] *“to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” ... “in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” ... “who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession, to the praise of his glory.”*

All that God does in and through us is to bring Him praise and glory from others.

The Good Shepherd gave His life for His sheep and the Great Shepherd gives His resurrected life to His sheep.

3 The Chief Shepherd

1 Peter 5:4 [NIV] *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”*

As Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ will return to gather His sheep who have been cared for by His under shepherds.

1 Peter 5:1-3 [NIV] *“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is*

under your care, serving as overseers, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

As we **all** mature the Chief Shepherd looks on us **all** as under shepherds.

Galatians 6:1-4 [NIV] *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else,”*

“*spiritual*” is referring to “*maturity*”, making us **all** “*elders*” by reason of age and experience in Christian living. As under shepherds we have certain responsibilities.

We must be continually alert to the voice of the Chief Shepherd as He speaks to us through His Word, the Christian Bible.

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.”*

We have to follow the Chief Shepherd one step at a time as we live for Him one day at a time.

John 10:4-5 [NIV] *“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.”*

We have to say very close to the Chief Shepherd as He leads us.

Psalms 23:1-4 [NIV] *“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

For all this to happen we have to be close to the Chief Shepherd at all times.

If we as sheep do stray, we must cry out for the Chief Shepherd’s help and trust Him to restore us.

Matthew 18:12-14 [NIV] *“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.”*

When we cry out we will find that the Chief Shepherd is already looking for us.

Luke 15:4-7 [NIV] *“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

The lost sheep who repents and is brought back into the fold is a reason for rejoicing at God’s Throne.

We must always be part of the Chief Shepherd’s flock following the spiritual leadership of His appointed under shepherds.

No flock or under shepherd is perfect but all are important to the Chief Shepherd.

Solitary sheep are always in danger, no matter how experienced they think they are.

Every sheep must be useful to the Chief Shepherd.

Not everyone is called to be a pastor [under shepherd] at this time but every believer is called to be a minister [servant] of the rest of the sheep in the flock by using the gifts that God the Father has given them.

1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7 [NIV] *“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” ... “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”*

1 Peter 4:10 [NIV] *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”*

If each sheep in the flock is faithful to follow, care and serve other sheep in the flock, the flock will be strong and God will multiply the sheep in that flock.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd.

We all need to ask ourselves the question; Are we one of His sheep?