

Does *Shepherding* Sheep Mean....

The task of *shepherding* is not easy. Growing up in *cattle country*, my meager knowledge of sheep and shepherding largely came from biblical illustrations that used them to describe both members of the Lord's *flock*, and those who *care and provide for, watch over, protect, and seek to find and return the straying ones*. After having been a *sheep* for 4+ decades, and having served as a *shepherd* also, please consider our title in conjunction with the following questions carefully, "**Does *shepherding sheep* mean:**

Having to convince them they are *sheep* rather than *goats*?" Even *straying sheep* are still "sheep," cf. 2Thessalonians 3:14-15, "*And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*" It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to persuade them to want to be *sheep* rather than *goats*?" Desire is always the *heart* of the matter. Sheep shouldn't, but often *want* to (still) be goats. This is despite the ultimate destiny of each: "*and He will put the sheep on His right... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.... into eternal life,*" Matthew 25:33,34,46; "*and the goats on the left.... Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... into eternal punishment,*" Matthew 25:33,41,46. It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to get them to act like *sheep* rather than *goats*?" Review the previous paragraph and then realize that typically *we do* what *we want*. If we *act* like *goats*, it is because we *want* to be *goats*- and God will treat us as such, James 4:1-4, "... *Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*" It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to find them when they run away from the *sheep* to be with the *goats*?" Yes, Luke 15:4, "*What man among, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which was lost, until he finds it?*" Though this parable doesn't really address *how* the sheep came to be *lost*, it really doesn't matter- it *is* lost! It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to assure them it's better to be a *sheep* than a *goat*?" They're looking at things wrong- "*For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory, far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal,*" 2Corinthians 4:17-18. It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to feed them *green pastures* when they prefer *goat grub*?" Remember, *goats* will eat pretty much *anything*, and be *happy* doing so- *sheep* are (and should be!) much more particular, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths,*" 2Timothy 4:3-4. It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to lead them to *still waters* when they prefer the excitement of *rapids*?" Though the benefits are overwhelming and obvious, it's usually a tough job because,

sadly, they've fallen *prey* to "*the passing pleasures of sin,*" Hebrews 11:25. It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to restore them to the safety of the *fold* when they desire the danger of the *open field*?" A *sheep* alone in the *open pasture* is an easy target- even for a *roaring lion*, 1Peter 5:8. It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to tell them about the *wolf* when they can't see him or say there is *no wolf*?" We've been warned that it *will* happen, "*I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them,*" Acts 20:29-30 (see also Romans 16:18). It shouldn't, but it will.

Having to....?" There are many others that could be added, but perhaps these will suffice to make a couple of points:

- 1- We *sheep* can make the *shepherd's* job one of *joy* and *happiness*, or *grief* and *heartbreak*, Hebrews 13:17 (strive for the *former* by doing what the verse says!) and,
- 2- *Shepherds*, you shouldn't *have to do* many of these tasks, but *you will*, and it will be worth it both *now* and *forever*, Luke 15:5-7!

Having once served as both "the preacher" and "an elder/shepherd" for a local congregation/ flock of the Lord's people, I was asked what it was like to wear both *hats* simultaneously. To answer that question, I recalled what my friend and colleague Rickie Jenkins advised me before I took on the additional responsibility of "*watch(ing) for souls*" and quoted him in my reply, "You get less sleep." May God bless true *shepherds* (cf. John 10:12ff) in their efforts to serve "*the owner*" and "*the sheep*"! And may God help us to remember to be *His (good) sheep* in order that as such we may bring Him and His *shepherds* "*joy and not... grief,*" Hebrews 13:17b!

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