

The Pattern of the Apostle Paul in Cooperating with Christ's Heavenly Ministry to Shepherd People for the Building Up of the Body of Christ

This week in our morning revival time we want to consider **the pattern of the Apostle Paul** in cooperating with Christ's heavenly ministry to shepherd people for the building up of the Body of Christ. While the ascended Christ is praying there, there would be men praying here; while He's shepherding **in heaven**, He needs people **on earth** who cooperate with Him to shepherd others. The Head of the Body needs a Body on earth to be one with Him; Christ is the Head, carrying out His heavenly ministry, and we are His Body, **carrying out His apostolic ministry**; by these **two ministries** echoing one another in coordination, God's great economy is being carried out. Shepherding is the all-inclusive care of the all-inclusive Christ rendered directly by Himself and indirectly through us to the members of the Body to cherish them, nourish them, feed them, and perfect them.

If you read 1 Thes. 2 and Acts 20:17-24 you will see a picture of how Paul was a pattern of shepherding both a brand new church (in Thessalonica) and a more established church (in Ephesus) **not just by teaching but by his person as a pattern**. By shepherding the saints, the believers, and the churches, Paul was carrying out his apostolic ministry in cooperation with Christ's heavenly ministry to build up the Body of Christ. There is only one way to build up the church as the Body of Christ, and that is by first letting Christ shepherd us and then cooperating with His heavenly ministry to shepherd others according to God.

We may look at the Apostle Paul and appreciate the more heroic part of his ministry, such as his trips to preach the gospel and raise up churches, escaping persecution or being stoned to death and yet not dying, escaping from the shipwreck and healing people, and other great things, **but** we may ignore the side of his shepherding people. We desperately need patterns in the local churches; we need not only the teachings and instructions but even more credible patterns and examples. In a family the children learn not merely by the parents teaching them, but **they watch** the parents, they pick up **gestures, accents, attitudes, and words** as they observe the pattern of their parents and thus they become **a reproduction** of their pattern.

We need to learn from the pattern of the apostle Paul to shepherd the flock of God by looking at the picture he presents to us and cooperating with Christ's heavenly ministry to shepherd others according to God. We may desire to serve God, but **if our person is wrong, we cannot be useful to Him**. It is meaningless for things to be done properly and in the right way in the church life if the persons doing them are not right. God pays attention more to what we are than to what we do. He doesn't want us to get things done – He wants to gain proper persons who are one with Him to cooperate with Him in His heavenly ministry. The Apostle Paul was such a one, and brother Watchman Nee was also such a one.

Paul enjoyed and experienced Christ, and to him Christ was so rich, wonderful, and real; he realized that Christ is in His heavenly ministry doing many things, and he, Paul cooperated with Christ to shepherd people for the building up of the Body. On the one hand the Lord Himself is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, and the Shepherd of our soul, and on the other hand He is seeking to not only shepherd us but to gain us to cooperate with Him and shepherd others according to God for the building up of the Body of Christ. By shepherding the saints, we carry out our ministry in cooperation with Christ's heavenly ministry to build up the Body. In cooperating with Christ's heavenly ministry and in God's work what matters most is not what we do but what we are. God is not after people who can do so many things for Him; He wants to gain proper persons who would live Christ, express Christ, manifest Christ, and shepherd others according to God. **Many times I wondered how** should we shepherd the saints, what is the best way, and what are some examples of doing this.

He was a pattern of **living** and **ministering Christ** to shepherd the saints according to God. He imparted to the saints not only the gospel and the truth but even more, his **own God-filled and God-constituted being**. He took care of the saints both individually from house to house and corporately in the meetings, and his living was his pattern to them. He fed the saints with his **own living of Christ**, and then he wrote them to remind them of his living. Paul was a pattern of one who imitated Christ and lived Christ, and he encouraged us to imitate him and those who live Christ. Today we want to see more of how Paul was a pattern to the believers in living and ministering Christ...So Paul took Christ as his everything – he took Christ as his **living**, his **pattern**, his **goal**, and his **secret**. In Phil. 1:19-21a we see that Paul took Christ as his living, and his yearning and aspiration was that he would live Christ and magnify Him in everything. In Phil. 2:5-16 Paul took Christ as his pattern, and he encouraged us that the mind which was in Christ would also be in us. In Phil. 3:7-14 Paul pursued Christ to gain Him, taking Christ as his goal; the fullest enjoyment and experience of Christ was the goal of Paul's life. In Phil. 4:11-13 Paul learned the secret – Christ; the secret of Paul's living and contentment was Christ and living Christ.

We shouldn't aspire to do a great work like the spiritual giants in the past, but we should follow the pattern of Paul to be those living and ministering Christ as the Spirit in our spirit to others, shepherding them according to God, so that the church as the Body of Christ may be built up. We may know a lot of things, our heart may be full of zeal, and we may be ready to go preach the gospel or visit others, but we need to have a proper being, a proper manner of life, so that others may not only hear the word but also see our demeanor, attitude, and living, and be touched by the Lord. We want to see some snapshots of the apostles' being, their manner of life, and their entrance toward the believers, and pray over these matters that we would live in such a way. As we see these **snapshots** of the apostles, we will get a panoramic view, a 360 degree view of who the apostles were and how we should be.

Learning to Cherish the Believers as a Nursing Mother

When He was on earth, the Lord Jesus was so approachable that all the sinners and tax collectors would hang out with Him, **not being condemned by His presence**. The apostle Paul as the Lord's reproduction cherished the believers and yearned over them not as an apostle but as a nursing mother would cherish and nourish and yearn over her own children. **What rank, dignity, or authority does a nursing mother have?** She really is a slave to her children, laboring day and night in love until they are fully grown. We should have no thought of dignity, position, or authority, but we should be those willing to cherish the believers, causing them to feel comfortable in our presence, and taking a tender care of them in love.

To cherish is something **very tender** and **lovely**; it is not to control, exercise authority over someone, or even merely serve, but be full of tenderness in caring for others. We need to be affectionately fond of the saints, affectionately desirous of them, like a nursing mother is affectionately interested in her child whom she nourishes and cherishes. To cherish people in our natural humanity, however, is not genuine; we must cherish people **with the Lord's presence** as the charming factor, as the reality of resurrection. We have to admit that we do not possess the charm needed to care for people; **only the humanity of Jesus** in resurrection is the real charm and attracting factor. On the one hand we need to cherish the believers with the Lord's presence, and on the other, we need to nourish them with the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry of three stages (Eph. 5:29).

We don't just spend a lot of time socializing with others and having a good time together as "**buddies**"; what we want is to **minister Christ**, the all-inclusive One, to the believers so that they would grow in life unto maturity and be perfected to function in the Body of Christ. The full ministry of Christ in the stages of incarnation, inclusion, and intensification is the substance, the truth which needs to constitute us and flow from us to others to feed them. *(Excerpt from the Ministry of the Word)*