

PASTORS' AND FLOCK'S ROLE IN ONE BODY

Ezekiel 34

by Philip Shields

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Summary: One Flock is on the way. Today: how we can make the division in the Body worse, even if we do nothing. Steps each can take to bring oneness about by God's Spirit. Ezekiel 34 and what God says to ministers and brethren and the role each must play in oneness. *I reveal whom God will use to bring us together as one family, one body, one flock.*
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Warm hello to my brothers and sisters who make up the Body of the Messiah and the Bride of Christ. We have a lot to cover today. Let's start with the end of the story, as told by Jesus the Christ:

John 10:16

"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

There *will be* one flock and one Shepherd. That's the end game. Isn't that exciting? It's a flock composed even of sheep not currently part of the fold, He says.

(An edited inserted paragraph) Something concerns me though. It's this: I fear too many of God's people who are content with their pastor and their local group, see no urgency in God's people acting, thinking, speaking and working as one body. That does not mean we have to be under one man-made organizational umbrella. Please understand that. But neither does it mean we should have little or nothing to do with one another. But people are content where they are. Rich and increased with goods spiritually, and in need of nothing spiritually, in effect. Thoughts range from "we're OK as we are" to "It's not my job to unite us, so what can I do?"—and we do nothing.

How will our Savior unite His people? Who will He use to do it? What will it take to get us working together – not just saying we know there are others who have God's spirit hither and yon - -but working together? Where will it begin? Or is it impossible for the spirit-led body of believers to ever really come together before the return of the King? Can we be divisive without even knowing it? What can we do be helping the Body of Christ become truly one?

Hello everyone, this is Philip Shields, just one sheep among the scattered flocks plus the many lost sheep scattered all over. I've given 4 messages about oneness. Today I'm going to go in depth into the role the pastors, the shepherds, played in this scattering – and the role the sheep themselves played in it. I hope this message will humble each of us, and lead us to a very deep and personal repentance before Yahweh, the only true God, and to His Son Yeshua the Messiah (John 17:3).

By the way – ***we have the new website up.*** If you have high-speed connection, instead of dial-up, ***please use the faster MP3 button*** to hear the messages. I do recommend you have the transcript as you hear them the messages. The quality will be better, the connection faster, etc. on MP3 than with Real Audio. Please get back to me if you are having any issues downloading.

Last time I showed how the biggest key to HEALING the wounds will be agape love of God in action. That must be remembered as we continue today. *Yeshua was first a friend to those He was seeking to save. Zacchaeus was a great example* (Luke 19:1-10). There is no evidence that he had already repented or changed his ways before Yeshua invited Himself to Zacchaeus' home. Is it possible that the experience of having such a holy man want to be his friend – is the very thing that tilted Zacchaeus over? The healed blind man – in John 9 – is another example. So is the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8). Yeshua's statement of "neither do I condemn you" was powerful. Sure, He went on to say "sin no more", but we all know we all continue to stumble long after the forgiveness. But the *love* Yeshua showed is the same love we must show one another – even those who have left the faith, even those who don't see things quite the same way we do.

Open Door

Someone new to the Church of God (COG), who wants to be baptized, let me know they're even wondering why we're not "one" now. She asked, "Why couldn't I just walk in to any COG group, in any city, if I were traveling?" The answer is that she *could* just walk in to many of the groups, but not all of them. I think most groups would openly welcome her. Some would want to know who she was and what's she's doing there, especially if she wasn't attired like the rest, or wore makeup in a no-makeup group, or came in with slacks instead of a dress. Remember, she's new.

The early church obviously had an open door policy to visitors from other church areas as well as brand new people coming in to check out the church group. Let's get back to that – though many of you already have that going. In Acts 2, when the 120 received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, hordes of people came in to where they were meeting. Perhaps they were meeting in an open area near the temple and not in a house by that time. In Acts 1, they're in a house. But probably not in Acts 2. And I don't know how or where they'd baptize 3,000 in a day without using the dozens of *mikvahs* (ritual baths) that surrounded the temple area. You can still see them today in the archaeological areas. There's no nearby river. The Kidron was usually just a stream or dry. But my point: people from the outside freely rushed in, and got to hear a sermon from Peter.

Also 1 Cor. 14:22-24 clearly states that even unbelieving "outsiders" could pop in to meetings and make their own observations. If you're unfamiliar with that passage, read it for yourself. But our body of believers and our fellowship must stop being exclusive and hard to find. God calls people, I know that, but we should be people of love and joy and openness. We just must start having a much more open door to anyone and everyone who wants to learn about the Way of God. Anyway, I thought the comment she made was something I should share.

Anyway, moving on: I'm confident I can say that ***our King and Master is very excited about how each day brings Him closer to marrying His Bride, the Church (2 Cor. 11:2).*** It's been a long time. He gave His downpayment (Greek "*arrabon*") of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, long ago. In the Greek, the modern word for engagement ring is "*arrabona*" – practically the same word for "earnest" or downpayment of the Holy Spirit. He's waited a long time.

His Bride is the "apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2:8). His Bride will be spotless and perfect, and will be one Body -- but we're not there yet. As someone said, and I agree with, the King is not returning to a Bride composed of hundreds of organizations of people who want little or nothing to do with one another. I personally feel a sense of urgency to this issue. It fills my heart and my spirit.

Identifying the Body of Christ

I recommend you hear the previous messages first. In case you haven't, here are the foundational scriptures about "the Body of Christ", the church. Colossians 1:18 identifies the Body and who is the Head of the body all in one verse:

Colossians 1:18

And He (Yeshua or Christ) *is the head of the body, the church*, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

- The "Body" of Christ is the Church of God (Col. 1:24 – "his body, the church"; 1 Cor. 12:27)
- There is only one body of Christ (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12-13; Rom. 12:4-5). He is marrying only one body, not bodies.
- Christ's One Body is a *spiritual* organism, not a denomination or organization or even group of organizations. We are placed into that Body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) after we have been purchased by the blood of Christ, making us belong to Him (Mark 9:41). Having the same Spirit is what makes us part of His body and part of one another. *We belong to Christ, not to any organization of men* (Mark 9:41; 1 Cor. 3:23; Gal. 3:29). We must quit saying we "belong to" or are "a part of" this or that organization or faction (1 Cor. 1:10-13). We are a part of Christ and belong to Him.
- *The One Body of Christ is highly likely to include individuals whom we would be surprised to see among Christ's Body.* John 10:16. Anyone with God's Holy Spirit is part of that body. I strongly suspect Yahweh's spirit has been given to some people who are in groups we would never suspect would have His spirit. That's just my opinion, and time will tell. But remember the Messiah said NOT to forbid people using His name, even though they weren't following Christ. *See Mark 9:38-40.* "He who is not against us is on our side."
- The Holy Spirit makes us one of His (Rom. 8:9, 14). That's the only way we are surely His.
- We are considered members, or body parts, of that one Body (1 Cor. 12:12-27)
- That makes us members *of one another* (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 4:25)
- One sign of His people is expressing and living a profoundly spiritual agape love we have for one another (John 13:34-35). The "one another" is not just for those in our organization, but for all believers with God's Spirit wherever they are. In fact we are to love all people, even those who make us their enemies.
- Jesus Christ, or Yeshua the Messiah, is the Head of His Body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23)
- What does the Head of the Body want for His Body? Oneness (John 17:10-11, 20-23).
- He is against division (1 Cor. 1:10-13) and commands there be NO division (1 Cor. 12:25).
- What does the Head do? He seeks the lost (Luke 19:9-10). The parable of the 99 and 1 sheep. He is all about restoration and bringing His sheep together. He is all about having one body.
- Any healthy body does what the Head wants. The head uses the body to accomplish its desires, whether to get dressed, or get a cup of coffee, or seek a lost brother and sister. Are we getting the point? Our King is the one who will restore the body and find and reconcile His lost sheep – but how? I'm 100% certain He will not act alone apart from His own Body, but will use His Body —you and me – to restore oneness, one lost sheep at a time. He will

use His thousands of Christ-led brothers and sisters to reconnect, forgive, reconcile and heal the wounds in His Body. I'll say more on this as we go along.

- Nothing will change until we admit that the schisms we have - - is a problem. Secondly, nothing will fully heal until we repent of what each of us has done to *cause* the wounds in the body. As you'll see today, we all have had a part and we all have to repent of our part in it.

So where does that leave us? *God hates discord and those who cause it – or do nothing to prevent it.*

Prov 6:16-19 NKJV and Apologetics Study Bible in brackets

These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are ***an abomination*** [In fact, seven are detestable) to Him: 17 A proud look [arrogant eyes –ASB], A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are [eager to run to evil] 19 A false witness who speaks lies, [a lying witness who gives false testimony] ***And one who sows discord among brethren. [one who stirs up trouble among brothers]***

Proactively do something to heal – or we're adding to the problem

Turn now to *Luke 11:23*. Read this with your own eyes in Scripture. In Yahweh's eyes, there's no standing on the sidelines with this. We're in – or we're out. We're hot – or we're cold. We are either taking proactive steps to bring about oneness, or we are scattering. (repeat).

Luke 11:23

“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”

Did we hear Him? “...he (or she) who does not gather with Me, scatters”. Are you gathering people together? Are you reconnecting? Are you seeking lost sheep? If not, can you and I be scattering?

He wants us so unified that our oneness with one another is a mirror of the oneness between God and His Son (John 17:20-23). We are to be so one, that we literally act as one healthy body – one unit, composed of many body parts but working together as one unit. *He wants us so loving to one another that the world will know, we must be His disciples.* That's what he says in John 13:34-35.

Do you see why I called for a day of fasting? I saw myself, and so many of us who caused discord or scattering – or at best, did nothing to cause oneness. “He who does not gather with me, scatters.” In or out. Hot or cold. Gatherer – or one who scatters. It's time. It's time we repent, it's time we pray like we've never prayed before. It's time we love like we've never loved before. It's time we stand up for God's one family as never before. Yes, it's time.

Today let's dive into where we left off last time. Turn to Matthew 22:37 please. Last time I showed how the whole Bible is fulfilled by loving God and loving people—and how LOVE will be the glue that will bind us together again. Love fulfills the law, it's what the Bible is all about. Love is the key part of the first and 2nd greatest commandment according to King Jesus, the Messiah.

The greatest commandment is not Sabbath keeping – though it's a part of the first and greatest commandment of “Love God”. Nor is the greatest commandment --“government”. Nor is it clean and unclean meats, or tithing, or the holydays, or the holyday calendar we should be using – all issues we have divided over. Those *aren't* the most important teachings and practices!

Matthew 22:37-40

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Love is #1. Other "weightier matters of the law" include mercy, justice and faith. Matthew 23:23.

Romans 13:8-10

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 *Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Last time we also covered that what separates us from God is sin.

Isaiah 59:2 "But *your iniquities have separated you from your God*; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear."

HOW we become ONE again

Jesus also gave the crucial key on *how* we are to become one with one another: We must first be one with God and Yeshua. John 17:21 – "that they may *be one [how?]-- in Us*".

We come together by first being one with Father and Son in the family. Lack of oneness therefore starts when we become separated from oneness with Father and Son. That's caused by sin, or by definition, lack of love. Love fulfills the law. Lack of love must break the law, causing sin.

Sin, therefore, in its simplest definition, besides 1 John 3:4 – the transgression of the law – is this: since love fulfills the law, then it follows that transgressing the law is – in its simplest form – not showing love to God and fellow mankind. That's why **James 4:17** says if we know to do something good and don't do it, we've sinned. It's not showing love. That's why 1 John and James are both full of admonitions that the Godly way of life is shown by actual acts of love.

What am I getting at? What's all this got to do with our divisions? It has everything to do with it!

The dividing in the church comes down to one root cause: lack of love. Sin that separates us from God and one another is simply defined as not loving God or man. We've forgotten that we are brothers and sisters.

At best we've acted too much like the prodigal son's elder – his older brother – who wasn't that happy that his brother who had disgraced the family name had come home. I know something about that. *Oneness wasn't being restored as long as – get this – the good son refused to come in and restore the repentant brother to oneness. Which brother was now the one on the outside?* It started with the sinful prodigal son being on the outside. *But once he restored oneness with Father, he was back inside the family.* Now who was left out? The one who had never left! He was the one now outside, outside of the party, outside of the fun and love and feasting and celebrating.

Repenting of that lack of forgiving love is the first thing we have to do. Turning ourselves around and **doing acts of love** to restore oneness – such as to find lost sheep, to become one happy family of God again, is the 2nd thing. So we did repent and seek God on Dec. 19. It may be good to fast again before Passover. If some of you feel led by God's spirit to tell me we should set another date for fasting for oneness, then we will. I will wait to hear from you.

It hurts our Master when we hurt one another. For we are each a part of His Body.

Have you and I pierced or wounded the Messiah?

QUICK QUESTION: *Is it possible we have all pierced and even wounded the Messiah?* If we have ever said or done anything against a brother or sister, we wounded HIM. Zechariah 13:6 is a verse that is so poignantly heart-felt: **Zech 13:6** – “And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.' As we say things and do things that cause disunity, we are piercing the Body of Christ.

Whenever we stab a sister or brother in the back, we might as well be stabbing Jesus in the back. When we hurt a member of his Body, we are piercing Him directly. We might as well hurt our Savior, when we say or do something hurtful to a sister or brother.

As we'll see today, being the light of God, helping bring people to repentance, helping bring oneness in a splintered body – does not start with poking scriptures at them. It starts with being there for them, being their friend, showing God's love in action. It starts with being a friend to those who have no friends. It starts with reaching out to those who have dropped away – and asking how they are, inviting them over, telling them you miss them. Then leave it at that for a while and let the seed of love you've planted have time to sprout.

The JOY OF FAMILY HARMONY

As we do this, we will experience the JOY of salvation, the JOY of being the FAMILY Of GOD! As I've said over and over, there's nothing more fun than brothers and sisters who love and respect each other – getting together as one. The laughter, the love, the playful jabs, the praying for one another, the encouragement of one another, the simple acceptance of so many different personalities – is just awesome. There's nothing like it. I've been part of this physically and spiritually and it is the highest high you can have.

And nothing is so painful in a family – as when a brother or sister is cut off, forgotten, not missed, rejected, disrespected, not wanted around here, and even marked as one we shall have nothing to do with. I've also experienced this in the spiritual body – and there's no darkness like it.

I like oneness better. So does Father. That's why when the prodigal son who had slept with pigs and prostitutes wanted to come home, the Father – who saw him a long ways off (that means he must have been looking) was so ecstatic and ran to meet him, forgive him, welcome him, restore him – and *celebrated* his return. The family will also celebrate the return, or we should! It's about Father now and giving Him some joy by seeing us give up our partisanship. Ephesians 4:6 says we have “ONE God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and IN you all”.

Father wants to feel the joy of watching and experiencing all His children celebrate and worship Him – as one. Are we going to deny our dear ABBA that incredible joy? We've denied Him that joy long enough. It's time. It's time we worship Him as one and let him be joyful about us again.

Father's telling us all something. Listen to His voice. Family of God, it's time. Children of the kingdom, it's time to come together. It's time to do God's work together. It's time to be together. It's time to worship the One Father of us all, together. Don't be like the prodigal son's brother who wanted no part in this happy togetherness – oh no, not after all He had done!

I'm calling on every child of God out there to add your voice to mine. Every elder who sees it, hears it – start speaking on it. Every brother and sister in Christ – start by praying for it. Then add to that your voice of desiring it. ***Spread the news – the family of God is coming together.*** Everything starts small. Call someone. Tell 10 people, and gradually the news will spread. Be part of this message from the ground floor up! For in fact we've heard from above, haven't we – "There must be no divisions among you" – 1 Cor. 12:25. "He who does not gather with Me, scatters".

You will be resisted. Some pastors will insist on keeping their flock under their thumbs and will not want to work with a brother "over there". Some brethren will insist they want nothing to do with some brethren, just like the prodigal's brother didn't – but press on. ***The gates of hell (hades) will not prevail against you.*** We will win. Yeshua promises us, "I will build My Church" – singular, one church, one body, one family, one spirit, one God, one Father, one hope, one doctrine ---are we hearing it (Eph. 4:3-6)? ONE, ONE, ONE, ONE. "And the gates of Hades, or hell, will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). A house divided cannot stand, so we must and we will become unified.

As I showed last time, gates don't attack. They defend. We are the ones on the attack against those spirits in high places trying to destroy the Family of God by dividing it and getting the family fighting one another. We attack the powers that are trying to discourage the Bride of the Christ. But the gates of hell will not be able to stand against our attack. We "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). We attack separation with actions that bring us together. We attack discouragement with hope. And we're promised, in the end, love wins.

"Oh death, where is your sting? Oh Hades, where is your victory? But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ" - **1 Cor. 15:55, 57.**

In the end, our Husband, the King, wins. I'm in. I'm part of this. Are you in – or out? Are you going to be a gatherer of God's children – or a scatterer? Are you hot – or cold? In between gets vomited out. We don't want that. So - I'm in. Come on -- let's follow our King and our King's stated will and become one. Let's find some common ground and come together.

THE MINISTERS' ROLE

I'm switching gears now. **Let's talk now about the role that both the ministers (Shepherds) and sheep in the flock played in the division, as well as the part they'll play in the coming oneness.**

Let me first say: I know there are MANY, MANY wonderful pastors and ministers. Apparently though, there were enough things said and done that facilitated the division – *possibly even among the ones considered now to be wonderful pastors* – that Yahweh spends a whole chapter in Ezekiel

34 on it. ***Even “good” pastors were part of an oppressive SYSTEM*** – and according to Ezekiel 34 we have to own up to it before oneness and healing will happen.

The fact Yahweh spends all of Ezekiel 34 on this shows the problem is systemic and widespread. Let me state it again: we ALL were involved one way or another in the dividing. God says so in Ezek 34.

WHY do I need to address the ministry – and brethren themselves? Because we each have to own up to our part in the divide. No real change is ever made until people admit a change is needed. We have to admit to a problem before we start working on a problem. We each have a confession to make, some repentance to do, and some apologies to make to those we’ve offended. There are many offended. There are many who have just plain quit because of abuse they suffered from pastors and leading members. They’re “fed up”.

I’m certainly not innocent in all of this either. Not at all. I have my share of confessing, repenting, apologizing and reconciling to do with various ones in the Body. Now I am inviting and urging all you other pastors to do the same unless you’ve never let anyone down. If the shoe fits, put it on. If not, if you’re lily white in all of this, then that’s between you and your Judge, the King.

First let me say a couple things:

** I’m not trying to be critical of Pastors, for that is not my job, nor am I qualified to do so. I’m simply going to read what GOD says was part of the cause of the division and scattering of the sheep. So these are God’s words, not mine. I’ve certainly done my share of falling short of what a pastor was supposed to have been. I was a salaried pastor for 12 years and in ministry for 14 years, with salary. I still share my studies though I’m not an employed pastor and haven’t been since 1989. But I do apply to myself as well, what I’m about to read.*

Let’s start with 1 Peter 5, and read some general comments to pastors. Please note that they are called “Shepherds” here. (The very word “pastor” comes from “pasture”).

1 Peter 5:1-5

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **2 Shepherd the flock of God** which is among you, **3 serving** as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock**; 4 and **when the Chief Shepherd appears**, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with **humility**, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

So we see in 1 Pet. 5:2 that elders are called Shepherds of the Flock of God. There is some authority there. ***But authority is benevolent only when used with humility and genuine love.*** Without that, authority can be abused. *Pastors, are we going to be lords and masters – or servants? (v.2-3)*

Turn now to Ezekiel 34. Yeshua is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4) as I discussed 2 messages back. Now in Ezekiel’s prophecy in Ezek 34, let’s read Yahweh’s stinging rebuke to the Shepherds without commentary. I hope – pastors – I hope you will join me in admitting we need forgiveness,

we need to change, we need to be pastors like GOD wants – or we will be removed from pastoring and He will find pastors HE wants (Ezek 34:10).

Ezekiel 34:1-10 Apologetics Study Bible

The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, prophesy *against the shepherds* of Israel. Prophesy, and say to them: This is what the Lord God says to the shepherds: Woe to the shepherds of Israel, who have been *feeding themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed their flock?* 3 You eat the fat, wear the wool, and butcher the fatlings, but you do not tend the flock. 4 *You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bandaged the injured, brought back the strays, or sought the lost. Instead, you have ruled them with violence and cruelty. 5 They were scattered for lack of a shepherd;* they became food for all the wild animals when they were scattered. 6 **My flock went astray** on all the mountains and every high hill. *They were scattered* over the whole face of the earth, and *there was no one searching or seeking for them.*

7 “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh. 8 As I live”—the declaration of the Lord God—“because My flock has become prey and food for every wild animal since they lack a shepherd, for *My shepherds do not search for My flock*, and because the shepherds feed themselves rather than My flock, 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord!

10“*This is what the Lord God says: **Look (behold), I am against the shepherds.** I will demand My flock from them and prevent them from shepherding the flock* [nkjv: cause them to cease feeding the sheep]. The shepherds will no longer feed themselves, for ***I will rescue My flock*** from their mouths so that they will not be food for them.”

I think based on what is said here, and what we read before in John 9-10, it is very clear our Husband, the Chief Shepherd, loves you, loves the flock, but is unhappy with the general state of the flock and with its shepherds. No wonder David so was greatly loved, because his character was formed caring for sheep. He risked his own life fighting for a lamb caught by a bear and another time, by a lion.

- * Shepherds are the elders (1 Pet 5:1-2). They can refer to other leaders as well.
- * “We are His people and sheep of His pasture”. (Psalm 100:3; 1 Pet 5:2)

So Shepherds = pastors and elders; sheep = the unordained brethren.

Being a pastor is a function – not rank – requiring loving oversight. It is open to potential abuse. God tested hundreds of ministers by giving them authority and power – and *He* says too many of us failed that test. There wasn't enough humility, service and love. ***Without humility and agape love, authority won't be used correctly.*** Authority is benevolent only when used by a humble leader.

v. 2 – Feeding themselves instead of feeding the flock

One of the big complaints from brethren in some of the larger COG (“Church of God”) groups is that sermons are tame, lacking meat, lacking effort, and seemingly lacking the power of God's spirit behind them. I hear that over and over. One of the primary jobs of a pastor is *to feed the flock*. I appeal to all pastors to spend 20-30 hours on each sermon going forward, much of that time spent on your knees with Bible and notepaper in hand. I personally have 30-40 messages in the mill, “percolating” as I call it, begging God to put His mind into them long before I give them.

Some pastors love to spend all their time in personal study and do not spend time visiting the brethren, counseling, answering questions, praying with the brethren. Those are also ways we feed the flock. But some like spending all their time researching, writing, and studying. Sure, we'd all love to do that. But that's not the entirety of your job description.

Worse yet, some pastors love spending so much of their time in personal pursuits. I saw this a lot in the ministry. In golf, racquetball, going to the spa or gym. In teen and children's camps and activities. Others loved to hunt and fish a lot. Those pursuits are not wrong in themselves. A pastor has to have a life as well, and has to have time for personal recreation. I understand that. But for some, it started taking up a lot of time and even sermon time discussing the latest golf game, etc.

Another way salaried pastors fed themselves is by using too much tithe money on a high living lifestyle. They generally drive the best cars in the congregation, have a large home, the nicest suits, and have everything paid for – their car, their insurances, car repairs, and all kinds of benefits and on and on. Letters regularly go out asking brethren to “dig deep” to support “the Work” – but much of this money also goes to the pastors. In this economy, the Sheep can't dig much deeper, pastors!!!

Ezek 34:4 - *NOT STRENGTHENING WEAK OR INJURED OR SEEKING THE LOST*

Pastors, especially outside of your immediate congregation, who was weak or injured or lost whom you sought out and strengthened, healed or found? But even within your congregation... If you can list a lot of people, maybe this doesn't apply to you.

Strengthening the weak does not mean the rest of the verse – “ruling with harshness”, or cruelty. It doesn't mean bellowing at people who don't seem to measure up. It means being patient and helping people with their problems, their depressions, their sadness, their discouragement. *“The weak” brethren aren't as much fun to be with as strong brethren so the weak tend to be left out.* Those who are often depressed, unemployed, sick, poor, have marital or other issues, or doctrinal issues. Who wants to focus on those issues? So the weak can get ignored. That must not be. I was actually trained this way: “Don't waste your time with time wasters. Spend your time on those who are contributing to the Body.” As a 26 year old pastor, I dutifully wrote that down. Now I see how wrong that was in spiritual context. Our Master, left the 99 sheep and went out looking for the 1 lost.

What about the “lost sheep”? I don't mean enticing sheep from another's fold to come to yours. I mean someone who has plain quit on everything, has left God, stopped praying and have given up. There are thousands of them out there. Is it possible—after praying about it first – that a loving phone call from you - pastor, a word of encouragement, a statement saying you've missed them... could it be that could re-ignite some hope in them? Or do you feel they are beyond being reclaimed? How many who have quit coming to church services have you been able to encourage back?

Yeshua actually said several times that His commission was to go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matthew 10:6; 15:24). It was later when He sent His disciples into all the world, including Samaria (Acts 1:8). We read before how when He invited himself to become a friend of Zacchaeus, He said, He had come to seek the lost (Luke 19:10). Any Shepherds under Him should do the same. I showed recently how ***Jesus actively searched for*** the formerly blind man who had been thrown out of the synagogue, out of his sheepfold.

Please be turning to James 5. I hope I successfully got this message across last time: *Those who are truly part of the Body of Christ will have His mindset and will be doing the very same thing the Head did and still does – finding lost sheep.* We will be finding ways to search out and reconnect with those who have nowhere to go, feel alone, some have even left the faith. Let's read a couple of passages I take very seriously. Notice in James 5, the context is one who left the truth.

James 5:19-20

19 Brethren, *if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,*
20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Daniel 12:3

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."

It's all too easy to just "let them go" when they leave the truth, of all things. But we're told: be a gatherer, a connector of people, a reuniter of friends. Perhaps then, after befriending, we might have a chance to help them find their way back to the faith and to righteousness. Loving friendship first.

Luke 11:23 – "...he who does not *gather* with me, scatters."

So pastors – yes, that's our job. Brethren – do you realize there are *former* pastors out here who also could use some encouragement? Who would also love to experience God's *agape* love from you? Brethren, turning people back is not a job just for pastors. You can, and should, do that as well.

Let's continue. **Why am I going into this in depth? Let me repeat: I do not believe healing will happen until the Pastors acknowledge there was systemic abuse** of power, abuse of money in the form of lavish living and a lack of concern for bleeding, lost sheep. Once we publicly confess that we were part of a system that handled things in a way God condemns – and promise to do things better going forward -- only then can I see oneness happening.

Ezek 34:4b – Ruling the Flock with violence and cruelty

This is one of the big reasons so many have just quit. **The stories of ministerial authoritarian abuse are legion.** So many have endless stories about either elders or church leaders being rough with them, barking at them, bellowing at them, running roughshod over them. And yes, I preach to myself too and confess times I mishandled things too. I've done it too and ask forgiveness. Going forward, it has to be better, more Christ-like. Ministers, shepherds, please get on the phone and acknowledge it to those you need to say something to.

Pastors too often got into a position of power, command and control of people's lives. In many cases, they were just in their 20's when this began. We ordained too many men, too young, in too much of a hurry. Men with no real life experience. Men who had just been married, no kids, no business experience, no child rearing experience, no personal marital experience yet, no experience with teens, no experience with jobs and the sabbath, and on and on and told them they were in charge of the church. Many of these pastors are now in their 50's to 70's, and for the most part still have not had a real job outside the ministry. Many still have not had to find work and deal with the sabbath. Now they have some life experience at least. Now they're grandpas themselves and hopefully have mellowed, and I am confident many, many pastors have mellowed.

Too many pastors over the years seemed to have the knack of **taking the joy out of salvation** (Ps 51:12). Going to worship Yahweh should be exciting, fun, loving, heart-warming, and encouraging – and yes, at times corrective – but overall, our heavenly Father is known as the Eternal God of love, joy, peace, kindness and gentleness and more! All the fruit of His spirit describe what He is like.

Yeshua's first miracle: water into 150 gallons of fine wine, after the other was used up. He was called a friend of tax collectors and sinners; a "glutton and a drunk (wine bibber)" Luke 7:34. Of course He was no glutton or drunkard, but neither was He so straight laced. He could have fun. So pastors, let's preach the truth, but let's be a brother! Let's let the JOY of God's salvation bubble up.

Pastors, I think one of the biggest steps we can take to begin some healing and oneness, and to help those who had quit on God to wake up and come back to the fold – is **an open and humble apology** to the brethren. I've done it to quite a few lately, one on one in many cases, and also in these messages. It's not easy at all. But we have to humble ourselves and do it, I think.

We preached that the #1 doctrine was Church Government – and so no wonder we felt we could run a church like a marine "boot camp" at times. No wonder the pastor's word was law and you never dared cross him or question him. But Yeshua says #1 doctrine is love for God and #2 is love for mankind – not abusive government.

But because of this over-emphasis on government, people were afraid to say anything when the pastor preached heresy or went off the rails in other ways. They thought they should stay with the ordained pastor, lest they be going against "church government". What would they have done if they had been an angel under Lucifer when he began to off the rails? Lucifer was God's anointed cherub. If they'd have stayed under him, thinking they had to, for church government's sake, they'd be demons today. Think of it. Those who followed Aaron's call to worship the golden calf were all executed. We do not attend worship services where gross heresy (such as the golden calf) is being preached. Aaron was a man of God over all – but we follow government only up to the point where it is telling us to disobey God. Then we must obey God rather than man.

Pastors looked at various *functions* in the body – such as apostle, evangelist, pastor and teacher – as positions of *rank*, as positions of authority and power – and wielded that authority. Part of the problem is that Romans 12:4 translates "function" as "office", implying authority and power. The Greek "praxis" refers to a function, a work to be done, an act to be done.

WE'RE FAMILY, NOT ARMY

What we were supposed to have instead of rank, was a family. God is the Father. Jesus is the older brother and all the rest of us are all brothers and sisters (Matthew 23:8) – each with our own function, not rank so much. In fact, those who went to the Church's college were told they were going to the equivalent of the "West Point" of the church. West Point is where army officers were groomed and prepared. Military rank was the model. Evangelists were likened to generals, pastors to captains. And it was wrong. The model is a loving family, as Scripture clearly shows, not the army.

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and with all propriety, the younger women as sisters.

Do we see “Family” in those verses? If we had talked to one another, and treated one another as family, this rank nonsense would have never gotten started. What do we see here? A loving family working together. Love is what will bind us together. Again it comes down to “all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love...” (Ephesians 4:2).

All this applies maybe even more so to pastors as it does everyone. Now let’s read more of God’s instruction to pastors. Turn now to Matt. 23 please. I remind you, I preach to myself too.

Matthew 23:6-12 talking about the scribes and Pharisees, or the religious leaders:

“They love the best places at feasts, *the best seats in the synagogues*, [FOT ministerial seating/parking] ⁷ greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' [literally ‘my Great one’] ⁸ But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, **and *you are all brethren***. [I don’t call my brother by Mr Shields! Nor was Peter “Mr. BarJonah”] ⁹ **Do not call anyone on earth** your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ¹⁰ And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. ¹¹ **But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.** ¹² **And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Ministers, it’s time to give up lofty titles if you have one. You know, even “**Rabbi**” – the actual letters in Hebrew mean “My Great One”. There is only One great one. Only One big name. Even insisting on being called “**Mr**” this or that as a religious title of honor is suspicious. I don’t call my physical older brother “Mr. Shields”, so why would I call a spiritual brother by “Mr.”? I can absolutely respect someone and use their first name. Or I can call someone “Mr.” but totally disrespect him in my heart. The title is not what conveys respect. The heart, and how we treat one another, is what conveys respect. It was simply Peter, not Mr. Bar-Jonah. “Presiding Evangelist”, “Regional director” – these all smack of power, not humility. Be a brother – not a dignitary. A servant, not a lord. Sit with the brethren. *Serve, help, just be a brother.* Avoid “head table” mentality and avoid having “ministerial summits”. “Summit”? That’s so wrong, so proud and so lofty.

Our flocks were poor, but we didn’t set a good example of how tithe dollars were spent. Yeshua our King walked everywhere. Jesus didn’t get a shiny new chariot every 2 years. Salaried pastors got a new sedan every 2 years. I think with the loss of tithes, many ministers today are not salaried and have no new “chariot” every 2 years. But salaried pastors are still very well taken care of. The quality of your car depended on your “rank”. So top ministers even had (in UK) a Rolls Royce and Jaguar—from tithe dollars. Yeshua slept on the ground, not in fancy hotels everywhere he went. He served brethren – but we had brethren serving pastors, building houses for some of them on free labor in some cases. I could go on and on with the lavish lifestyles.

We taught 3 tithes – but *full time salaried ministers never had to tithe a 2nd or 3rd tithe. Never.* And did they ever panic when they got laid off and had to try to find a job without working on the sabbath! I know! I’ve been there. That’s one reason I run my own business.

Luke 22:24-26

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them *should be considered the greatest.* ²⁵ And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles *exercise lordship* over them, and those who *exercise authority* over them are called '**benefactors**.' ²⁶ But not so among

you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

“**Benefactors**”- that’s interesting. If you were a “yes man” to the pastor and never questioned what he did, he became the benefactor to you, In other words, you were rewarded. You got to give sermonettes, or even split sermons at the Feast. Maybe you’d be more likely to be ordained a deacon or elder. I hate to think that ever happened, but I know it did. Of course there are many deacons and elders who are in their position because they were wonderful examples of service, humility and should have been ordained. That’s fine. But the “benefactor” system certainly was in full swing in too many places.

Should we respect the pastors and ministers? Absolutely. See **Heb. 13:7, 14; 1 Cor. 16:16; Phil. 2:25-30 (especially verse 29); 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** and many more.

But honor goes both ways. Ministers, we are also to *honor* the *brethren*. Scripture after scripture tell us that we are to “honor everyone” (1 Pet. 2:17). We are all to submit *to one another* (Ephesians 5:21). Peter – in his section about elders – says “all of you be submissive *to one another*” (1 Pet. 5:5). Ministers also must apply the scriptures to “esteem others better than yourselves” – *to themselves as well!*

Having said all this, yes there are false teachers. There are wolves in sheep’s clothing. There are pastors we need to stay away from. Having said that, many of these disagreements are over style or minor doctrinal differences or arguments over who will be in charge. It comes down once again to repenting, humbling ourselves, and esteeming one another better than ourselves (Phil 2:3-4).

WHO will deliver God’s Sheep and make us ONE?

Ezekiel 34:11-12

¹¹ 'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed ***I Myself will search for My sheep*** and seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.

v.16-- "***I will seek what was lost and bring back what was *driven away*, bind up the broken and strengthen what was *sick*; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.***"

As I’ve been showing over and over, the Body will do what the Head wants. The Head accomplishes what He wants, by using His body, just like you do.

So who will at least begin the process of finding God’s lost sheep and unifying us? It will be ANYONE who is a member of the Body finding others who have quit or given up. It will be a lot of “anyones” doing what they once thought “someone” else should do. It will be a lot of nobodies, who once waited for a “somebody” to show up to do the work of unifying the body of Christ. It will be a lot of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. It will be all who realize we have all been called to be “kings and priests” – leadership roles. So each of us will now step up to the plate and begin to bring the body together in our uniquely gifted way, with our special insight.

So I personally do not expect it to be one supreme human leader who will bring us together. It will be Yeshua, the Christ, working through and by His Spirit to move each and every part of his body to start working together. We're all being called to be leaders, and we all must start taking the leadership way of thinking that each of us has a stake in the success of a healthy, working Body.

Each of us must be doing his/her own part to contribute the gifts you've been given, to gather people together, to bring together, to love, to connect, to befriend, to forgive and to esteem one another.

Each of us has to stand up to the plate, take our turn at bringing something to the Body "as each part does its share", as Ephesians says. Somehow, as we do, God knows those who are His and He will bring union about.

#4 – SOME MEMBERS OF THE FLOCK ARE ALSO PART OF THE PROBLEM

Now let's continue in Ezekiel 34:17-24. It isn't just the Shepherds whom Yahweh is angry at. By the way, let me state again: the God I serve is a happy God, a joyful God who can and does also get very angry at times. Let's not deny either side of our Father.

17 'And you, O My flock, thus says the Eternal God: "Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. 18 Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture — and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? 19 And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet."

*20 "Therefore thus says Yahweh Adonai to them: "Behold, ***I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. 21 Because YOU have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad,*** 22 therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.*

23 I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them — My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, Yahweh, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, Yahweh, have spoken.

So this scattering has also been caused, partly at least, by abusive brethren! Do you see why I've had to say that each and every one of us need to go humbly before our Maker in deep repentance and seek His favor again? If you don't think you need to repent, don't forget that Laodecians are told to repent. We modeled our fast after Daniel 9, when even Daniel repented.

The sheep have a role in this. We should not have been drinking of defiled waters of false doctrine. Neither should we have feared to step out of the trampled down pasture – and find good pasture.

And again, note verse 21 – "you [the sheep] pushed with side and shoulder, butted out the weak ones with your horns and scattered them abroad..."

If we would treat every single person on this planet like we would if we dearly loved them, what kind of church would we have? If we would treat every single person as a brother or *potential* brother/sister, what awesome love we could have.

Philippians 2:1-4

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being *like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.* 3 *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.* 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Concrete ways to reach out:

- Like Jesus was to Zacchaeus – reach out. Be a friend. Let people know you miss them if they have quit coming. Being a friend will make you more effective if and when they are ready to talk.
- Send get well cards signed by everyone in your local flock for someone needing prayers in another flock of a different sheepfold (church group). Let them see you're still considering them "brethren". "For if one member suffers, all members suffer with it..." (1 Cor. 12:26).
- your whole group go visit another flock once every 2 months. Baby steps Or better yet, you decide individually to do so, every 5-6 weeks. Stay where you're getting fed for the bulk of your time, but reach out to other brothers once in a while.

I had hoped to have time to cover material on a study I had done wherever the words "one another" shows up. It's an amazing study but I'll save that for another time. But just be aware of the many verses which tell us how to treat "one another" – accepting, forbearing, forgiving, caring for, praying for, remembering, speaking to one another, comfort one another, bear with one another, meeting with one another, be likeminded with one another, esteem one another better, and on and on and on. There's one word that comes up far more often than the others. That one word is to "love one another". To love one another is stated over and over by Paul, Peter and John.

Unity will come, in God's time and God's way. Believe in it, that true unity must be possible.

Let's wrap up. I've been actively involved in a Facebook goal of reconnecting with every single one from our private college class. At the time we were in college, we all were part of the same church, the same organization. Now we're all scattered in a dozen countries around the world and many have left their beliefs. But they're still my friends. We're slowly finding each one and we're submitting photos of what it was like. There are endless funny jabs at each other, and it's like we're already getting together – by internet. I don't know where this will end, but just be a friend. Be there.

We're all different. In any expanded family, there are the ones who are funny goofballs and some serious minded ones. There are those who are recluses, and those who can't stand to be alone. There are smart ones and ones not so smart. There are lazy ones and hard working ones. But they're all part of the family!

God made us different from each other. Yahweh loves variety. Just look at his creation. Millions of different kinds of life forms, flowers, bugs, trees, animals, and fish... all different.... And all part of His creation. We are like that too. We're all different and He put each of us in His family for His reasons. He wants us there. He wants you there. He wants even a wretch like me there. We're all forgiven wretches, by the way. . . and He's transforming all these former recovering sinners into His holy Children, His holy family, His one Body -- as one as He and His Son are one.

It won't be the same complete family without you. We need pastors, we need brethren, we need all of us coming together finally as one big happy family, as diverse and different even as we are.

Don't forget Luke 11:23 – "...He who does not gather with Me, scatters." We have to be active in this. We're in or out. God prefers we be hot or cold. We're either gathering or scattering. There's no in-between.

Can we accept what the Father has created? Can we bear with those whom Father has forgiven? Can we love all whom He loved, having forgiven them while yet sinners? Can we forgive those who have badly hurt us? Can we love those we feel don't love us? We must – for that is what children of God do. For when we act and live and breathe like Father – that is proving we are His children. You see, children look like their Father. They walk like their Father. They sound like their Father. They are extensions of the Family. One loving Family with God as Father and with Christ as elder brother.

Let's read again what our Master Shepherd and King says. Don't pretend all the "sheep" are just in our familiar "church of God" groups. There may well be many more scattered in other "folds".

John 10:16

Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

Time is short. I hope you will spread the news: the family is going to be one. The Body is one and is coming together. You're in – or out. Come on, be in. You're either scattering – or gathering. We need you to be a gatherer, a connector of people. As we come to the Passover, which is all about redemption, forgiveness, acceptance and how God passes over our sins Let's apply that spirit to one another.

Until next time, your brother in Christ – Philip Shields. May God's spirit of unity and love bring us together in one. God bless you all.