

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **Cowboy or Shepherd?**

When I was a bit younger (well, many years younger), I worked some as a farm and ranch hand on my Uncle Clide Keeney's place in Eldorado, Texas. I also did some work on the place owned by my friend John Caughron's family in Oklahoma. This all involved various things—plowing, chopping cotton, running a combine, etc. But two things about this rustic life came to mind recently in thinking about leadership. We had sheep on Uncle Clide's place, and there were cattle on John's family ranch.

So...the question has to do with elders and preachers, and anyone else who may be in a leadership position. In their role as leaders, should they be acting more like cowboys, or more like shepherds?

In the cowboy role, my horse and I were involved in rounding up cattle. In this activity, one has to drive the cattle. One cannot effectively lead cattle. That's why in the old west you had "cattle drives" when ranchers drove their cattle to the markets in Kansas City or other markets to be shipped by rail to their final destination. The famous Chisolm Trail ran through Uncle Clide's place and the trail was still quite visible even after many years as thousands of cattle had been driven along that way.

One might have to lasso a steer to get him back in line with the rest of the herd, and in effect you have to constantly harass the herd to keep it moving. If you are not diligent in this, the cattle will wander off in all directions. Gentleness is not necessarily a job requirement to be a good cattle driver.

I have known some preachers who act much like cowboys. They push and harass to keep everyone in line. They are stern and demanding. Gentleness is not in their vocabulary.

Then there are shepherds. Someone has suggested that the reason we are called sheep is because sheep are dumb. Well, I'm not sure that's what it's all about. But we are all

familiar with the 23rd Psalm, and the several references Christ made to shepherds and sheep.

In working with sheep, you generally have to lead them rather than drive them. A true shepherd cares for his sheep. Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Note his attitude in Mark 6:34: "When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things."

It is worth noting that elders are also referred to as shepherds in Acts 20:28, as Paul addressed the Ephesian elders: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Peter also made reference to the shepherd image as he told his fellow elders to "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3, NASB).

Consider the qualifications for elders Paul mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:3: "gentle, peaceable." I think we all know the kind of behavior that describes.

James described the wisdom from above in James 3:17 which includes this idea of gentleness and peaceable.

Peaceable – If we are to be followers of Jesus Christ, the "Prince of Peace," then we should strive to apply Romans 12:18: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." This passage allows that others may not be at peace with us, and we may not be able to control that, but we can control our own attitudes and behavior.

One qualification for elders is "not quick-tempered" ("not soon angry" — ASV, Titus 1:7).

Some seem to become angry at even slight provocations, and God said this is what leads to sin, and "unwholesome words" that "give the devil an opportunity." If we are to be known as children of God, we need to be sure we live up to the name. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9).

Gentle — It should be obvious that gentleness and peaceable are close kin. The Greek word carries the idea of "mild: – gentle, moderation, patient." It is clear that the word "gentleman" comes from this, and that brings up a picture of kindness and good manners. Some have suggested this connotes strength under control. In the Philippines, I have

seen small children riding large caraboas (We would call them water buffalos.) That is “strength under control.”

Isaiah gives a picture that fits well here. “Like a shepherd He will tend His flock. In His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes” (40:11). Doesn’t that give us a picture of “gentleness?”

That certainly describes the shepherd picture rather than the cowboy picture. Peter said that these leaders should not “lord it over” (ASV) those in their care. Albert Barnes has this comment about this in his commentary: “Neither as being lords. Marg., overruling. The word here used (katakuriw) is rendered exercise dominion over, in Matt. 20:25; exercise lordship over, in Mark 10:42; and overcame, in Acts 19:16. It does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. It refers properly to that kind of jurisdiction which civil rulers or magistrates exercise. This is an exercise of authority, as contradistinguished from the influence of reason, persuasion, and example.”

Matthew Poole’s Commentary has the following to say about gentle: “It implies that gentleness (as we translate it) whereby we bear with others’ infirmities, forgive injuries, interpret all things for the best, recede from our own right for peace sake; and is opposed to that austerity and rigidness in our practices and censures, which will bear with nothing in weak, dissenting, or offending brethren.” I couldn’t have said it better.

Children are not afraid to approach a gentle person. Luke tells of the people who were bringing their small children to Jesus that he might touch them. Evidently they saw that Jesus was a gentle person (Luke 18:15-16). How gentle do others perceive us to be?

Reasonable (easy to be entreated — ASV, willing to yield – NKJV) – This suggests that such a person can be reasoned with. Someone with whom you can have an intelligent discussion, or even a disagreement. Such a person is not stubborn or obstinate. The words “moderation” and “patient” are also included in the definition of the Greek word.

This particular word has an obvious connection to leaders. If a shepherd is a harsh, unreasonable man, will his sheep feel comfortable around him? I think not.

If Christians are to have confidence in their leaders — elders, preachers, etc. — certainly they need to feel free to approach these men, or even women who may be teachers. I have known preachers who seemed offended if anyone would dare question them. I have approached others with a simple suggestion, and was met with a several minute tirade of self-justification and blaming others. I have known elders and preachers who were always right. I have known teachers who seemingly would not consider another view. They may

have been right in their understanding, but there are times when they may be in error, and thus need to be reasonable in their attitude, and willing to listen. The opposite of that would be a spirit of arrogance. Thus others are hesitant, or even afraid, to approach them.

“The sense is, that he who is under the influence of the wisdom which is from above, is not a stiff, stern, obstinate, unyielding man. He does not take a position, and then hold it whether right or wrong; he is not a man on whom no arguments or persuasions can have any influence” (Albert Barnes New Testament Commentary).

Those in positions of authority or influence must take heed that it not go to their head.

We remember the picture Christ painted of the shepherd who left the 99 to go look for the one that was lost, that had evidently wandered away (Matt. 18:12-13). When he found the lost one, do you suppose he beat it with his staff while shouting “Bad sheep! Bad sheep!” That hardly fits the picture of the gentle shepherd.

The writer of Hebrews has an admonition for both the sheep and the shepherds. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). The sheep are to submit to the shepherds, but the shepherds will have to “give an account” as to how they have led.

Let those who are leaders, whether elders, preachers or teachers, see to it that we emulate the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Shepherds are better with sheep than cowboys.

- Jefferson David Tant

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## **They Will Not Mix!**

Oil and water will not mix, and neither will spirituality and worldliness. When church members try to mix worldliness and Christianity, they can never succeed, for either Christianity will conquer worldliness or the love of this world will kill Christianity. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15).

The tragic evidence of worldliness can be seen easily in the lives of those Christians who have been drawn away by their lusts. They want to be regarded favorably both in the church and in the world. They will make every effort to so compromise that the gospel will never be offered to a single soul. While they are so careful not to offend others they

themselves are very easily offended by the preaching of the truth in love. How tragic that in spite of everything God has bestowed for our good, some will make shipwreck of their faith on the rock of worldliness.

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- > "When you have studied the whole Bible you will have found in it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and to all truth!"
  - > "Conceit is the devil's gift to little men!"
  - > "The best time to attend to your neighbor's business is when you are asleep!"
  - > "Sparkling conversation is made by filling the mouth with gems of thought!"
  - > "Those who look for opportunities to hate, miss many opportunities to love!"
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**THIS WEEK'S LESSONS:** Sunday morning: *"Identifying the Lord's Church!"* (Text: Matt. 16:13-19); Sunday evening: Hebrews Class: Lesson 25, p. 144).