

The Shepherd's Exhortation, Part 3

Selected Scriptures

Well, we return to this topical series on shepherding, as I said, part 2 of what we started last week on the Shepherd's Exhortation. And if you were here with us last week, you know that we were a few layers deep in sub-sub-points. So I can't exactly dive in right where I left off without confusing some people who may have not been here last week.

So I want to give just at least a little bit of introduction, and in case you weren't able to be here last week or you don't remember exactly where we were, I sympathize with that and I'm just going to start today where I began last time by defining a term. We're talking about the shepherd's exhortation. The first message in the series is to talk about the shepherd's instruction. That's the teaching ministry, the preaching ministry, that's getting the Word of God into you, and all that goes into that, just a very brief survey of that.

This time it's the shepherd's exhortation, to take what's instructed and then work it into your lives through command,

through urging, through pleading, through just encouragement. That is most of what pastors do. That's what distinguishes pastors from even evangelists and teachers in Ephesians 4:11 because they are the ones who are, have the ministry of exhortation as a kind of a job description.

So what is exhortation? The word *paraklesis* or the verb *parakaleo*, *para* meaning alongside. It's a preposition, but *kaleo* is a verb that means to call to, to summon. So, to, literally, it's to come alongside and call someone to, well, obedience. To exhort means to, basically to use, the big idea is to use speech to compel someone, persuade someone to a certain action or to a certain attitude, or even to forbid a certain action or attitude. Exhortation is about persuasion. It's about encouragement, all with righteousness as the chief concern, righteousness as defined by God.

Exhortation is most often in ministry, most often in our individual ministries, most often in pastoral ministry, exhortation is most often gentle. In fact, it's so gentle it's barely detectable by the one who's being exhorted, because it comes in just normal conversation, comes in a soft voice in a very informal way, with words of comfort and kind of a tenderness and persuasion.

There are times, though, that a situation may dictate a stronger voice, a more persistent voice of maybe admonition, correction, warning, or even strict command. You can hear the range of this idea of exhortation. There is a semantic range that's pretty broad with the word, exhortation, to exhort, *parakaleo*, but you can kind of hear the range in the concept in Paul's letter to the Corinthians as he gives them the choice in one verse between two options.

He says, "What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?" I could tell you, reading the Apostle Paul, as we all can read plainly in the text of Scripture, he wants to come in love and a spirit of gentleness. That's what every single one of us wants to do, is only speak with the spirit of gentleness and tenderness and kindness. But at times, as Paul knows with the Corinthian church, and if you're familiar with it at all, you know that there was disobedience in the church, and if disobedience is not going to be dealt with by the church, then he as the Apostle is going to step in with a rod.

So, gentle: Shall I come to you gently, or shall I come to you sternly, severely? Both are appropriate in the apostolic ministry and in the pastoring, shepherding ministry that extends

out of that. Exhortation really is the bread and butter of shepherding, to lead people with pastoral exhortation and then to model exhortation for the church at large so that everybody can see how it's done. This is vital, for any sufficient treatment of the shepherd's task is to talk about not only instruction, not only the preaching ministry, but preaching, is preaching when it's also accompanied by exhortation.

So here's a, a working thesis, just a sentence that kind of gets your mind around the topic for today. Shepherds exhort the flock from a foundation of biblical, doctrinal, theological truth so that Christians love, serve, and obey God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. Shepherds exhort the flock of God, and they exhort the flock of God from a foundation, if I could just sum it up in this word, of instruction. They exhort the flock of God from a foundation of instruction in the truth, what the Bible teaches, what the doctrines of the Bible are, what the theology of Scripture is.

They start from that foundation, that platform, and they exhort the flock of God so that the flock, Christians, love, serve, and obey God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. That's the point. That's what we're after. As I said last time as I introduced the subject, the voice of exhortation sadly

has gone silent in many churches today. And I think that the people of God are the worse for it. I think the Christian witness in our time is worse for it.

From time to time they do polls in the country and talk about how many percentage of the country believes in God, goes to church, professes to be Christians and all that stuff. And there were, I mean, the numbers aren't so great these days, and I think that's actually aligning with reality and a reality that's been with us for many, many decades. But it is, as the numbers used to look better about how many people are Christians and how many attend church and how many are evangelicals.

I used to look around and say, well, then, if that's true, if all these people went to this crusade and this conference, and so many people were saved, why are we acting the way we're acting? Why is the country so corrupt? Why is the decay so deeply set in and so pronounced and so pervasive? What explains that? I have to think that the salt has lost its some of its saltiness and light has dimmed. And there are those who profess to have the light, but they put it under a bushel and hide it, put it under a bed.

I would say that those who claim to be salt and light in this earth are not salt and light, but rather a worthless,

saltless salt that's thrown out and just worth nothing, just mixed in with the gravel, and a light that's actually become darkness. There is still salt in this earth. Churches, many, there are still many faithful churches like ours. They're just not heard much anymore. There still is the light that shines in the pulpits of, of faithful churches across this country and across this world. And that's what we want to see, is that light shine more brightly, that salt not lose, lose its savor but become even saltier.

It's my ambition and aim that we do that here, that we aim to recover the ministry of exhortation because that's what does it: when people are commanded not to follow this world, but commanded to follow Christ and to love his Word and to worship in Spirit and in truth and let their lives actually match their profession. That's exactly what all of us who know Christ want.

And so when I exhort you, as we exhort you, as you exhort one another, it's landing in receptive hearts, isn't it? Because we all want this. The ministry of exhortation isn't simply a, an aspect of the shepherd's task; it's a matter of church-wide practice, and, and it's an expression of our love for one another, right?

We don't want to see people continuing in sin, so we exhort them. We don't want to see people wandering and drifting, so we exhort them. We don't want to see people loving things more [less] than God, we, so we exhort them. We want to see people love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love their neighbor as their self.

So we're involved in exhortation. Two main points on the pastor's exhortation. I'll just mention them to you. These are the points I gave you last time for the sermon. Main points. First, number one, by exhortation, sinners are saved and sanctified; number one, by exhortation, sinners are saved and sanctified, first main point.

And we supported this point by looking at the Lord's Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20. The main command in that commission is make disciples. And then there are supporting verbal nouns called participles that support the main command and tell us how to make disciples. There's a, the very, the sentence starts out with, with one, as you go, or it could be translated, that participle could be translated as a command: go. But it's, go or as you go, be making disciples.

There's the main command, and then there are two supporting participles telling us how to make disciples. We make disciples,

you know this, by baptizing and by teaching. Both of those tasks, baptize and teach, summarize far more than meets the eye. Baptizing is the end of a process, sometimes a long process, of evangelistic teaching, a Christian teaching a non-Christian. There's a long process of teaching and many things for an unbelieving person, a non-Christian, to understand before they come to faith in Christ.

So at the end of biblical doctrinal instruction that's aimed at conversion, targeted at conversion, the converted sinner at the end of that process repents and believes and demonstrates that they have repented and believed by obeying the command of Christ to be baptized. So they do that. Likewise in the task of teaching. Teaching equips a disciple to reach a goal, namely, the goal, as the Lord lays out in the Great Commission is, to keep or to observe all that I have commanded, he said. Again, the aim of the instruction in that teaching, the end is sanctification, that the disciple learns to walk in obedience to the truth.

Both of those tasks, baptizing and teaching, both of those tasks are the work of the local church to make disciples. And at the heart of both of those tasks, mixed in with both of those tasks, is this work, this ministry of exhortation, because God

has ordained instruction to join with exhortation, that together the instruction with exhortation would affect salvation for sinners and then would sanctify those who come to faith in Christ.

He's chosen exhortation, this voice of command, to provoke hard hearts, to stir and awaken dull consciences, to move the will, to consider what the mind has been instructed with, and drive the will to its knees, put faith in Christ in humility and repentance. This is why Christian instruction, if it's going to be Christian instruction, must always press the conscience, must always call for submission, must always call for a verdict, and, and it's a verdict that's unto the obedience of faith, for the faith that comes from God. True saving faith is by definition an obedient faith. All others are counterfeits of men and demons and false religion.

So instruction targets the intellect. Exhortation targets the will and exposes the affections. And by the combined work of instruction and exhortation, which is the shepherding ministry, the pastoral ministry, God penetrates the heart, invex, injects the truth into the heart to redeem sinners and to then sanctify them, to make them holy. So that's the first point we covered

last time. That's just a quick summary. By exhortation, sinners are saved and sanctified.

Here's the second point that we started into last time, number two: By exhortation, pastors shepherd the flock. By exhortation, pastors shepherd the flock or if you prefer, by exhortation, shepherds pastor the flock. You can turn that around; they're interchangeable.

Give you sever, several sub-points on exhortation in pastoral ministry to show, A, that exhortation is a part of the pastor's duty; and B, why exhortation is part of the pastor's duty; and then C, what exhortation encompasses, the scope of exhortation, if you will. So A, B, and C, sub-points under this main point, a pastor shepherding the flock with exhortation.

Letter A, the point is that exhortation is, that it is a thing. I know it's been lost in our time. I know it's uncommon and unfamiliar and, for many, uncomfortable. But it does exist as a key duty of the pastorate. In the administration of shepherding the church, exhortation is key.

What Christ commanded the church through the Apostles and the prophets is delivered to believers in local churches by those whom he called, gifted, and qualified, according to Ephesians 4:11: the evangelist, the pastors, and the teachers.

The means of delivering the truth to the flock: instruction and exhortation. We've talked about this; this is just a quick summary.

Paul told Timothy, 1 Timothy 4:13, "Give your attention to the public reading of Scripture," by which he meant the explanation of Scripture, so expository preaching. "Give your attention to the public reading of Scripture," just say what's there, "to exhortation and to teaching." So give the implications of the Scripture. Help people understand what this means for them, not just what it means in Scripture, but what it means for them, what they must do with it, and then command them to do it, is what he's saying.

1 Timothy 6:2, "These things teach and exhort." "You must," familiar to many of us, 2 Timothy 4:2, "preach the word, and do so by reproving and rebuking and exhorting with great patience and instruction." Paul told Titus to appoint men as elders who "hold fast the faithful word," in Titus 1:9, "in order that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it." That's kind of two sides of that shepherding coin: the exhortation in sound doctrine, pushing them, persuading them, compelling them toward righteous behavior; but also refuting those who contradict.

Anybody who's going to get in the way of that good, righteous movement toward the truth, toward un, toward goodness of God, to please him in all things, anybody who gets in the way, refute those who contradict it, whether it's by their doctrine, their teaching, their instruction, or by their lifestyle. "Refute those who contradict it." Titus 2:15, "These things speak, exhort, reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

Obviously, God calls pastors to do this, to exhort, to command the conscience, to call all people to obedience. So let's ask this question, letter B, why is exhortation necessary? Why does there have to be the voice of authority in shepherding? Why can't you just tell people what's there and then just let them come to their own conclusions and figure it out themselves?

You may remember I started to give you some reasons for that last time, five reasons why exhortation is a pastoral necessity. First, it's to stimulate growth by regularly challenging the will, because it's challenging the will that tests the true understanding of the truth.

You only know what people, if people have really assimilated the truth of Scripture by how? By if they're walking in it, by if they're doing it, by if they're obedient to it,

because by virtue of what it is, divine revelation, true truth, as some have called it; if it's true, if it's reality, you only know that you've, a person's assimilated it if they actually use it, walk in it, obey it.

If they hear it and walk away unchanged, they have not assimilated it, right? Intellectually apprehending the truth, that's step one of learning. But practicing the truth, living by it, submitting to the truth, setting your priorities by the truth, that is how you know whether someone has learned the truth or whether they have not, whether they're just giving it lip service.

It's not what someone, merely what someone says; it's how they live, too. It's not just your confession of the truth; it's your practice of it. So if the will is not challenged, if the will is not spoken to, engaged, commanded, then the manner of life and the priorities don't change either, and we're right to question the assimilation of the truth if they don't practice the truth.

As we said, there's only one who's ever lived, only one human being who's ever lived, for whom the unpacking or the instruction in the truth was enough. He needed no exhortation. He needed no command, though he got it in reading of the

Scripture, but he needed no command because his heart was pure and holy. He had no sin nature. His name: Jesus of Nazareth.

He's the only one who from childhood truly obeyed everything in the law because it was so compelling and because it was so good and righteous and holy. And his holy, pure heart loved holiness. Of course, there's command in there, but that's not what really drove him. Oh, I got to do this because the father says to do it. No. I love the father. I'm going to do whatever he says. For the rest of us, who are born into this world with a sin nature, who are born fallen, the sin nature is so powerful and law-like and influential, we need command. We need to be stirred from our dullness, awakened from our sleep, and stirred into action by command, by exhortation, by encouragement.

So by exhortation we test the will. Number two, second reason exhortation is necessary, is to warn professing Christians that profession is not enough, that hearing or even apprehending truth is not enough. We must live it out, and it must change us. And you may say, well, you just said that. Yeah, I said it, but I'm going to say it with a little bit more of consequence in this point because Jesus said in Matthew 7:21,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." This is about eternal things.

You can sit in a church all your life and have your mind stimulated and intellectually satisfied with teaching. You can go out amening sermons, but if it does not change you, my friend, be warned. There are going to be many who come on that day, on the Day of Judgment, and they will say to the Lord's face, Lord, Lord, did we not do this and this and this? Didn't I attend church? I mean, you should see my notebook of sermon notes. That guy you had me under preached long sermons. I endured it, mostly without complaining.

Many are going to come on Judgment Day making very sincere claims, pointing even to remarkable works and Jesus will respond to them, "I never knew you. Never. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." Again, practice of righteousness or practice of lawlessness? Is this perfection in righteousness? No. Is this absolute giving over to lawlessness? No. But what's the trajectory of your life? Are you pursuing righteousness as a habit? Are you pursuing it in your speech? Are you pursuing righteousness in your relationships, or do you let some who are a little closer to you slide in their disobedience? For the sake

of keeping the relationship, do you pull back and not say what you ought to say?

Again, we're all tempted, we're all tempted to hold back the truth, not walk in the truth. I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about our, our, our sometimes failing. God is so kind with us, isn't he? I'm talking about the trajectory of our life, when we see that we've been unfaithful in some way, do we hate it? Do we point it out? Do we expose it, confess it, and repent of it? Or do we just shrug and forget it and move on?

Persuasion by exhortation, by admonition, challenges a disengaged will. And when the intellect is properly instructed, when, when the will is challenged, something else then happens. The heart is exposed, along with all of its desires, along with its true affections. This leads to another reason exhortation is necessary. And this is where we stopped last time. So we pick it up here, and you can pick up your pen if you're taking notes. Third, why exhortation is necessary, third, to stimulate growth by addressing and exposing the affections, affections that can drift back toward idolatry under the influence of the sin nature.

Exhortation stimulates growth in the Christian by addressing and exposing the affections. And by affections, I

mean religious affections. I'm talking about what we, deep down inside, what we truly love and what we don't love; what we hate and what we don't hate; what compels us, what really drives us, and what repels us; what we pull away from, what we avoid.

Are we compelled by righteous affections, or are we dull in our affections? Or worse, do we lack religious affections altogether? It's by exhortation that we're exposing the religious affections, what someone truly loves, what compels them, what drives them. We're exposing religious affections to reveal the need to grow and repent, in some cases to be regenerated altogether. Sometimes, the flirting with idolatry isn't flirting with idolatry; it's a whole-hearted, full embrace of idolatry. And if that's the case, it can be confessed as sin. It could, the idols can be abandoned. It could be regenerated to new life by God's grace.

Beloved, I, I say this to you just as a fellow sinner, redeemed by God's grace, but one, I am familiar with my own heart and my own struggles, my own challenges, my own failings, my own weaknesses. I know myself, and so I think I also know you.

I believe as a church, and this is not to condemn our church, it's just to talk about every church, really, but I

believe we do not fear the Lord as we really should. We don't fear the Lord as deeply as we should, as consistently as we should, by revering him and keeping his word. According to Deuteronomy 10:12, we need to fear the Lord, revere him, and keep his Word. We tend to be man-centered man-fearers and we have to constantly be fighting the fight to be God-fearers, to put him at the center and revere him and him alone.

We do not love the law of God as we should. We don't love his law as we should. We don't recognize the law as summed up in love for God, according to Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22, Romans 13:8-10. We don't love God as we should in the law. The entire law is summed up in love and that reveals further we don't love God as we should because if we don't love his law, we don't love him. Love comes from God, 1 John 4:7. Love is placed within our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he's given us, Romans 5:5. Love grows in us by the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. And love teaches us obedience, 1 John 5:3. The one who doesn't obey does not love, because love is an obedient love.

So we don't love God as we should and it follows, then, that we don't obey God as we should. If we don't love him as we should, we don't obey him as we should. Obedience requires a humble submission to authority, God's authority, yes, but God-

ordained human authority, too. And so we find, when we don't obey God as we should and we don't submit to his authority, we find we don't submit to authority as we should.

We don't recognize how good it is to line up under God-ordained authority and that God disperses his blessings through God-ordained authority; tend to be rebels. We kind of, in this country, pride ourselves on being rebels. So if we don't fear the Lord as we should, we don't love the law of God as we should. That means we don't love God as we should. That means we don't obey God as we should. We don't submit to authority as we should. And that means we don't seek the blessing of God as we should.

The blessing of God in our lives is not the thing we're chasing. We're chasing something else. Why? What, what can we want other than the blessing of God in our lives? What could we want in our lives other than the smile of God over the way we live and the way we think and the way we act and speak? What else could we want?

We don't seek the blessing of God as we should. We try to gain things for ourselves and get our own blessing. We try to get it by our own understanding. We're driven by worldly desires and fleshly longings, and we keep chasing distractions. And I'm

telling you, this world is, you know this, filled with enticing distractions, really, really cool, sparkly things that come out every season, every year, all the time, things that are so fun and diverting, it's incredible.

Godly affections rest in God's good gifts, rest in the things that he has given us, and doesn't complain or envy about the things he hasn't given us. We accept our station in life. We accept, we accept our finitude. We accept the intellectual condition he's given us, the experiences he's given us, the opportunities he's given us. We submit to his will rather than striving for gain and trying to hold on to gain. The ambition of godly affections is to love God, worship him, serve him in gratitude and you can do that in any station, any circumstance, any situation in life.

That chain of virtues I just mentioned, walked us through, fearing God, loving the law of God and the God of the law, obeying God, submitting to authority, seeking God's blessing through worship and service, these are less matters of intellect, and they're more about matters of the will and the affections, aren't they?

It's not about what we understand. We understand things pretty well. I mean, grade school children can understand what

the Bible says. They, they read it sometimes, don't they? And they look up at the adults in their lives and say, so why aren't you living this way? So Mom and Dad, if that's true, why are we as a family doing that? You ever had to answer that question? I have.

These are less matters of the intellect, very easy to understand, actually. Really, they are matters of the will, and the will is much harder, and the affections are much more devious. So there's nothing like the voice of authority through a word of exhortation to expose the heart's affections and reveal the motives and intentions, to make the will wiggle a little bit.

Tell a man, no, and see what happens. Confront him in error or sin, and see what happens. Give him correction in something he thought he did famously well. And you say, well, let me help you, there. There's some good things, here, but let me help you with these things and see what happens. You're sure to discover the affections of his heart, what he wants, what he's after, and what angers him.

There are many who occupy places of leadership these days, in all places of leadership, at all institutions, and they refuse to resist a person's will. They never risk offending.

They will do whatever they can to stay popular and to be liked, and instead they get what they want by manipulation, and deceit, and flattery. Tell people what they want to hear, and you keep your job.

According to Proverbs 29:5, "He who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet." But the one who tells the truth exhorts in the truth, who risks offense by delivering open rebuke, which is better than hidden love, Proverbs 27:5, This one finds favor with God and the godly, Proverbs 28:23.

But it starts by exhorting people to fear the Lord, regard for the law of God, for the love of God, for obedience to God, for submission to authority, leading to the blessing of God in the joy and the gratitude of worshipping and serving God. These things come, all of them flow out of a result of fearing God. So that's where exhortation aims.

Seventeenth-century Puritan William Gouge wrote this, "A true fear of God makes us respect more what God requires and commands than what our corrupt heart desires and suggests. It subdues our unruly passions and brings them within the compass of duty. It makes us deny ourselves and our own desires. And through the corruption of our nature and inborn pride, we are

loathe to submit. Yet God's fear will bring down that proud mind and make us humble and gentle."

That's what our exhortation aims at. That's why exhortation is the defining feature of pastoral ministry and why it must be joined to instruction. Because without exhortation, preaching is dead and lifeless. With exhortation, the fear of the Lord is at work to provoke repentance in the heart of sinners.

We could state the same point in another way, in terms of the transcendentals. You've heard of the transcendentals: the true, the good, and the beautiful. Even if you don't know that those are the transcendentals, they are in medieval scholastic terms, the true, the good, the beautiful. That's what all that God is and does and what his creation has provided and what, what is intellectually proper and right and fitting. It's all consists in the true and the good and the beautiful, and instruction seeks to satisfy the intellect in the knowledge of what's true.

Listen, we are so far from understanding truth and goodness and beauty, and that is what the Word of God does for us, is to bring us back to wholeness as people. To be image-bearers of God is to understand and respond to what is true, and good, and beautiful, and to understand that in God there is an objective

reality to truth, and an objective reality to goodness, yes, and an objective reality to beauty.

Beauty is not, as we've been told so often, in the eye of the beholder, as if our subjective impressions determine beauty. You start there and say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, you know what's next? Goodness is in the eye of the beholder. Oh, and then truth is in the eye of the beholder. Everything is up for grabs when these transcendental realities become matters of subjective experience.

No, these are objective things, and truth, goodness, and beauty are in God alone, who is absolute and objective, truth and goodness and beauty. We, created his image, through the Fall, we recognize the truth as error, and goodness is an imposition on our freedom, and beauty is ugliness, and ugliness we count as beauty. And so when we're saved, we're saved to understand what we're made for, to give glory to God, and to enjoy him in the beauty of his holiness. This is what we're saved for, what we're saved to.

And so instruction in the church and from the shepherding ministry is to satisfy your intellect in the knowledge of what is true. Our exhortation as shepherds and pastors aims to satisfy your will at the pursuit of what is good because the

regenerate will, is disturbed and troubled by pursuing what is bad. Jonathan King puts it this way in his book he's called *The Beauty of the Lord*. He says, "In the truth the," intellect, "intellect is at rest; and in the good, the will is at rest. But in the beautiful, both intellect and will together are at rest."

And I'll just add this: When the intellect and the will are at perfect peace and rest in the resplendent beauty of the Lord God, it is then that our souls are filled with this transcendent delight. We lift about, above whatever troubles us, whatever ails us, whether it's health or finance or relational issues. We transcend all of that and delight in our God because in him our minds and intellects are satisfied and our wills are directed toward good things, and our delight is found in the beauty of the Lord and his holiness.

Look, we all await glorification to partake of the fullness of that delight, but even now we have a foretaste of glory divine, and beloved, as your shepherds that is what we want you to enjoy, is to delight now in the beauty of the Lord. Psalm 27:4, says, "One thing I have asked from Yahweh, and that shall I seek, that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Yahweh and to meditate in his temple."