

SIX WAYS YOU MAY BE KILLING YOUR SHEEP

By Robert B. Thomas

Few men have lived the hard life as Jacob lived it. He wrestled with an angel and won the match. He spent many nights as a lone wanderer with only a stone to pillow his head. It is remarkable then, that this man, accustomed to the rough ways of the world, possessed a tenderness for the little ones of his flock.

This tenderness of Jacob for these little ones should be found in the heart of every man who is charged by the Holy Spirit to “feed the flock of God.” Numerous little ones have died from being overdriven by a thoughtless shepherd. This message deals briefly with six ways to overdrive the flock.

1. INSISTING ON YOUR OPINIONS

The flock can be overdriven by condemning them for not being correct in all their opinions of Christian doctrine. It is certain that God would have everyone zealous for the truth, but not in such an overbearing way that it kills the flock. A spirit which isolates cannot possibly help the small ones grow strong in the faith.

According to Peter, the little ones should be fed on the sincere milk of the Word. Strong meat may strengthen the mature one, but it will kill the young. Tolerance for only the strong brings out the smallness in a man. The weak should be picked up, not picked on! No new child of God was ever 100 percent correct, and it is doubtful if many are even now after being a Christian for a number of years. Therefore, the man of God should not be guilty of placing such demands of absolute correctness upon new Christians. This will make them die before they have time enough to gain some strength in God.

2. USING YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A STANDARD

When standards of personal experiences are set up, and others are demanded to live up to them, you are overdriving the flock. The wise one will realize that God by the Holy Spirit deals with each one of His children according to his particular need. The lessons which one needed to learn when he was young in the Lord may not be needed by the next person who determines to become a child of God. No one has the right to say to another, "This is the way it happened with me, and I am sure it will happen the same way with everyone who really surrenders his life to God." In trying to live up to the experiences and expectations of others, many a young one has been overtaxed and has fallen by the wayside.

3. DEMANDING "GREATER FAITH"

The flock has been overdriven by demanding a higher degree of faith, courage, and conviction that the young Christian has had the time to develop in his Life. The Christian life is a growing life! The church is a place for the perfecting of the saints.

If perfection were a requirement for membership in the church, many would be outside still knocking on the door, waiting for the day when they would qualify for membership.

Babies are not born mature, neither are the children of God. Babies do not all grow at the same growth rate, neither do the children of God. Babies do not all develop strength in the same facets of growth, neither do the children of God.

Jude, in verse three, says, *"Contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."* It is unnecessary to contend for that which has already been obtained. The shepherd of the flock must encourage the little ones of the flock to grow; he must not condemn them if they do not grow as fast as he expects them to. The slow rate of growth may not be all the fault of the flock.

4. BOASTFULNESS

Manifesting a holier-than-thou attitude will surely drive the flock until they die. When men brag about their bigness, they are revealing their smallness. It is true that God does not expect men to walk in the gutter, but He would have them know that this is where they would be, if it were not for His grace.

One person is not capable of determining the degree of holiness in another. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. The leader should live so as to be recognized as a leader, and he can do this without wearing an arm band with his title on it *for* all to see. It is the responsibility of the man of God to call the attention of the people to Jesus Christ and not to himself.

For a minister to place himself on a high throne and look down on his people will drive them away instead of bringing them to the Lord. Be holy, and that holiness will advertise itself; it will draw men unto the Master.

5. CONDEMNATION

Another way to overdrive the flock is to always condemn, and never commend. No one can live on a steady diet of scorn, ridicule, rebuke, and chastisement. While it is agreed that these things are necessary at times, usually, only a pinch of them here and there will suffice to meet the need of the situation.

It seems so much easier to tell a person what he should do, what he did wrong, and what he is failing to do, than to commend him for the right, good, and constructive things which he has done. Let us learn from the Master who made it clear that He came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Jesus further states, *“Who so shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea”* (Matthew 18:6). St. Paul describes the Christian calling of the shepherd of the flock: *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God”* (2 Corinthians 5:19, 20)

6. STRESSING TRIBULATION

To dwell on the woes, trials, hardships, and tribulations will certainly bring death to the little ones. The strongest of the flock cannot survive if this is the only thing he knows about the Christian life.

No one will deny the fact of these trials, temptations, and hardships to those in this good way. Yet, each one must be made to realize the fact that the Gospel is also good news, and that the Christian life is the good life. Point out the joys, happiness, victories, and the many rewards promised to the overcomers.

Every story has its two sides, and the Gospel story has its bright side. When one has weighed the one against the other, then, and then only, is he qualified to make a sound judgement. Some little ones of the flock have been unable to make up their minds because they have heard only one side of the story, and this has not been the good one.

A person who feels the weight of his sins is in need of a burden bearer, and the work of the man of God is to make this known. *“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28). These beautiful, refreshing words of Jesus embrace the Christian message to man. Ministers are failing God, and are failing God’s people, when they fail to point up this glorious aspect of the Gospel of Christ.

It would be well for the minister, as well as beneficial to his flock, if he would spend more time on the sunny side of the Christian faith. A world that is sick, lonely, depressed, and afraid needs very badly the message of hope and deliverance found in the Gospel of Christ. The good shepherd would have His ministers be healers of men, not mere analyzers who point out the disease and offer no recommendation for cure.

There is a brighter side of this Christian life. May God grant that His followers will come to realize this, and live in the climate, and preach it to the flock lest they die from being overdriven.

In describing Him as the ideal shepherd, Isaiah pictures the Messiah as follows: *“He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young”* (Isaiah 40: 11). This is Jesus, who is the believer’s example in all things, He would have every true shepherd imitate this element of tenderness in caring for those little ones whom He has called into His fold.