

The Shepherd and His Staff

by Phil Clarkson

The shepherd's staff is a powerful symbol of the Holy Spirit's role in guiding, comforting, and drawing us close to God.

Scripture: John 16:13

Topics: "Gods Guidance", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Phil Clarkson delves into the symbolism of the shepherd's staff in Psalm 23:4, highlighting how it represents the comfort, guidance, and intimate relationship that God provides to His people through His Word and Spirit. Just as a shepherd uses his staff to draw sheep together, guide them, and make his presence known, God, through His Spirit, draws believers into fellowship with one another and guides them in the paths of truth and righteousness, reassuring them of His care and affection.

Transcript

"Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me": -- Psalm 23:4

The shepherd's staff is normally a long, slender stick, often with a crook or hook on one end. It is selected with care by the owner; it is shaped, smoothed, and cut to best suit his own personal use.

Some of the most moving memories I carry with me from Africa and the Middle East are of seeing elderly shepherds in the twilight of life, standing silently at sunset, leaning on their staves, watching their flocks with contented spirits. Somehow the staff is of special comfort to the shepherd himself.

Just as the rod of God is emblematic of the Word of God, so the staff of God is symbolic of the Spirit of God. In Christ's dealings with us as individuals there is the essence of the sweetness, the comfort and consolation, the gentle correction brought about by the work of His gracious Spirit.

There are three areas of sheep management in which the staff plays a most significant role:

1. The first of these lies in drawing sheep together into an intimate relationship. The shepherd will use his staff to gently lift a newborn lamb and bring it to its mother if they become separated. He does this because he does not wish to have the ewe reject her offspring if it bears the odor of his hands upon it. I have watched skilled shepherds moving swiftly with their staves amongst thousands of ewes that were lambing simultaneously.

But in precisely the same way, the staff is used by the shepherd to reach out and catch individual sheep, young or old, and draw them close to himself for intimate examination. The staff is very useful this way for the shy and timid sheep that normally tend to keep at a distance from the shepherd.

Similarly in the Christian life we find the gracious Holy Spirit, "The Comforter," drawing folks together into a warm, personal fellowship with one another. It is also He Who draws us to Christ, for as we are told in Rev. 22:17, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come."

2. The staff is also used for guiding sheep. Again and again I have seen a shepherd use his staff to guide his sheep gently into a new path or through some gate or along dangerous, difficult routes. The tip of the long slender stick is laid gently against the animal's side and the pressure applied guides the sheep in the way the owner wants it to go. Thus the sheep is reassured of its proper path.

In our walk with God we are told explicitly by Christ Himself that it would be His Spirit who would be sent to guide us and to lead us into all truth (Jn. 16:13). This same gracious Spirit takes the truth of God, the Word of God, and makes it plain to our hearts and minds and spiritual understanding. As we comply and cooperate with His gentle prompting, a sense of safety, comfort and well-being envelops us.

3. The staff also makes the presence of the Shepherd real to the sheep. It is the Holy Spirit Who comes quietly but emphatically to make the life of Christ, my Shepherd, real and personal and intimate to me. Through Him I am "in touch" with Christ (Jn. 15:26). There steals over me the keen awareness that I am His and He is mine. In all of this there is enormous comfort and a sublime sense of "oneness," of "belonging," of "being in His care," and hence the object of His special affection.

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