

Zwingli – The Shepherd (Excerpts)

Therefore Christ teaches to be ready to bear the cross daily, for persecution grows the more the divine word grows. The more that grows, the more the flesh is angered. Therefore they are wrong who think they will soon obtain rest, that they will not have to suffer great persecution for the sake of the word of God. Even though the people come to the Word of God in droves, nevertheless there will be opposition enough from the high ones of this time. Even if they were not there, then all the more the false teachers will stand up, who have more knowledge than love, and for the sake of a hazelnut, will wound all the simple and quiet ones to show how learned they are. Hereby the cross becomes very burdensome and requires new strength; for offense of the simple does not take place without great concern by the strong who are concerned on behalf of the simple. As Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 11:29: “Who is offended that I am not burned?” In short, every day there is a new cross; it must be so. Here the soul is not only taken for the bodily life but for human feeling, intention or counsel. Whoever retreats from the Word of God for the sake of this ephemeral life will lose his life. Whoever depends on his own knowledge, counsel or feeling, thinking therewith to save himself, will destroy his own soul. Therefore the shepherd must deny himself, throw off his self-love, and certainly prepare himself to bear each day a new cross. Christ Jesus himself did so, always subjugating his will to that of the Father, bearing every cross until he came to the honor of sitting at the right hand of God.

When now the shepherd, or any person, empties himself in this way, then the next thing is to be filled again with God, that is, he has all his confidence and consolation in God. This Christ demonstrated in his disciples whom he cares for not only with temporal nourishment (since they follow him) in that they answered that nothing was lacking, when he asked them whether they lacked anything as he had sent them out without staff and sack. (Cf. Lk. 22:35.)

Christ also breathed on them and before he bestowed the office of preaching on them (Jn. 20:22) said to them: “Take the Holy Spirit.” For none is suitable for feeding the sheep unless he has emptied himself and only God dwells in him and speaks out of him. Therefore he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem until they had received the promised spirit. (Cf. Lk. 24:29; Acts 1:4). When they had received it with much joy and rejoicing they began from that hour on to preach. Thus must the shepherd lead his sheep into no other pasture than that in which he has previously been nourished, that is, in the knowledge and trust of God. So must he always know God beforehand and have all his solace in him.

Following that, he should begin to preach as Christ began: “Repent!” (Mt. 4:17.) It was with this form that the forerunner John the Baptist also began. (Cf. Mt. 3:2.) Now no one will repent who does not know how evil he is. Therefore, here must sin be preached, and then salvation. Let no one here be led astray by the fact that Christ says in Matthew 10:7 and Mark 16:15 to preach only salvation or the gospel. For always the illness must be recognized before one takes the medicine.

Christ also in those passages takes the word of salvation in terms of grace, for the gospel is the message of the certain grace of God. However, the recognition of sin, which also is necessary, brings nothing other than despair in ourselves and powerfully drives us to the mercy of God. Of that mercy we are certain, for God has given his son for us. Therefore he names the means of redemption in those passages after the medicine. However in Luke 24:47 he links repentance or remorse and forgiveness with one another, saying: “thus in his name (that is, in Christ’s) repentance or remorse and forgiveness of sins must be preached to all people.” See! Here are the gospel and repentance connected; for no one really rejoices in the gospel who has not previously rightly recognized the disease of sin.

Now if a person has recognized his misery and found after that salvation in Christ Jesus it is not seemly any longer to live in sin. Therefore the shepherd must also carefully prevent the washed sheep’s falling again in the excrement, that is, after the believers have come into knowledge of their Savior and have experienced the friendly grace of God, that they should thereafter lead a blameless life so that they no longer walk in death.

Not to fear is the armor. So now you want to say: I would without doubt certainly know even if Christ had not said so, that is, where I do not fear anything, there I would attack all things bravely. If it were given to me not to fear then I would stand steadfast, but not if I am only told not to be afraid. Therefore Christ shows us how

to attain the point that we are without fear in John 16:33: "These things have I spoken to you that you have peace in me. You will have anxiety or affliction in the world; but do not be afraid, for I have overcome the world." Here we see the pioneer, Christ. He calls us to be untroubled and to go forward in his work, although at the same time we are faced with affliction. The world cannot do anything different to the shepherd. But herein lies our certain comfort, that he is the victor over the world. And if we are his loyal servants, then he will also overcome these afflictions for us. Therefore we should now be joyous.

And now a summary wherein you can recognize the false shepherds:

1. All who do not teach are nothing but wolves, though they might be called shepherd, bishop, or king. See in this connection how many teaching bishops there are.
2. Those who teach their own dreams rather than the word of God are wolves.
3. Those who teach the word of God, yet not to the honor of God, but for themselves and their head, the Pope, for protection of their fabricated high station, are harmful wolves, coming in sheep's clothing.
4. Those who teach already and teach even with the word of God, but do not, however, disturb the greatest aggravators, the leaders, but allow their tyranny to grow, are flattering wolves or traitors of the people.
5. Those who do not practice with works what they teach with the word are nothing among the Christian people, destroying much more with their works than they build with their words.
6. Those who do not pay attention to the poor but let them be oppressed and burdened, are false shepherds.
7. Those who wear the name of shepherd, yet rule in the worldly sense are the most evil werewolves.
8. Those who gather riches, filling sack, purse, storehouse and cellar are true werewolves. And finally, those who do other things with doctrine than undertaking to plant the knowledge, love and childlike fear of God among the people are false shepherds. They must soon be removed from the sheep or they will devour them entirely.
9. Therefore it is easy to understand that all those are false shepherds who lead from the Creator to the creature.

By Ulrich Zwingli