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**Biblical Overview: The Slave Motif; 2nd Week Initial Post**

On Sunday mornings across the nation, Ministers give the invitation to believers for repentance and non-believers, to be saved. Many may not know the depth of this call as newborn Christians. They are entering into a “slave to righteousness” relation with Jesus Christ. In Gal 5: 13 ESV, for you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. The Old Testament perspective reveals that slavery existed in the Bible, while the goal of being a follower of God is to be a “slave” to God.; slavery to righteousness, Rom 6:18 ESV. Harris speaks about this “slave” concept from the perspective of the New Testament, and of slavery as one way of describing the believer’s relation to Christ. (Harris, 2018, p. 69). In the Old Testament, Exodus 1, the Egyptian masters worked the Israelites “ruthlessly”, and made their lives “bitter” with “hard” service.

Harris (2018) also establishes a Lordship by God. In John 20:28, we are acknowledging the deity of Christ. When Thomas addressed Jesus as ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:28), he was applying to the Nazarene an expression used commonly in the Psalms about Yahweh. Moreover, the combination of ‘Lord’ and ‘God’ shows that the title ‘Lord’ connotes divinity (Harris, 2018, p. 89)

Harris (2018) also asserts that just as slaves in the traditional sense may receive punishment for bad behavior, likewise also the Christian slave. During his absence, Jesus’ slaves (douloi, six uses) must engage in profitable service, for on his return as ‘the master (kyrios) of those slaves’ (v. 19) he will reward productive, faithful service (‘good and trustworthy doulos’, vv. 21, 23), while unproductive work will incur judgment (Harris, 2018, p. 92)

Slaves of Christ also have a service to God which include living for Christ, obedience, and being pleasing to God, while suffering along life’s journey. Our goal is to be a great servant for God, as Christ is our model for imitation as He was a slave to God until death (Phil 2: 7-8) Matt 11:28 says, ‘My yoke is easy’, he means that the yoke I impose on those who come to me fits easily on the neck’, because he is a gentle-hearted Master. (Harris 2018, p. 93). A slave of God has a vertical and a horizontal relationship with God and others. (Harris, 2018, p. 69).

References:

Murray J Harris (2018). New Studies in Biblical Theology: Volume 8: Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ. Retrieved from [https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com](https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/)

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The motif of the shepherd is found throughout the scripture. In the Old Testament God has words of strong rebuke and warning for bad shepherds, and prophecies of a good shepherd that is to come. In the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd and we find in the epistles the notion of good shepherding extended to those who would lead in the church.

The idea of shepherding, and in specific the idea of God acting as the Shepherd of His people, is a motif found throughout the Bible, from beginning to end. In Gen. 48:24, as Jacob, on his deathbed summarized his life, he declared that God had been his “shepherd all of his life to this day.”

There are numbers of passages in the OT that make references to a shepherd who is to come and who is to play a significant role in the history of Israel. In the case of Is. 44:28 the shepherd is named Cyrus. In the remaining passages, the identity of the shepherd is unknown. Most passages that refer to the coming shepherd are clear as to this person being the Messiah. What is not as clear is when He will come and what He will do at that time. Ezek. 34:23, there is some controversy concerning the shepherd’s identity and I would argue that the person of the shepherd is the Messiah. In contrast to Israel’s past leaders and the shepherds of Jesus’ day, His pastoral activity is marked not by the exploitation of the flocks entrusted to His care, but rather by self-sacrifice, the impartation of life, and protection.

John continues this metaphor for Jesus as Israel’s leader right through to the end of Scripture, and even history, as he shares his vision of heaven were Jesus, “the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd” (Rev 7:17).

It is not only John that sees Jesus as God’s promised shepherd leader, but the author of the letter to the Hebrews also writes of Jesus as, “that great Shepherd of the sheep.” (Heb 13:20). However, the metaphor does not simply find fulfilment in Christ in the New Testament but finds its perpetuation in the leadership of the early church. Walter C. Wright notes in Relational Leadership, Jude, in much the same vain as Ezekiel, condemns those leaders who care for themselves rather than the church as, “shepherds who feed only themselves” (Jude 12). Paul, in his farewell address to the elders of the Ephesian church, instructs them to be, “shepherds of the church of God” (Acts 20:28). In these two examples we see that the metaphor is preserved in relation to both good and bad leadership in the new church.

Simply put, if the church needs shepherds then the shepherd motif will be of the utmost relevance and as long as the church is made up of sheep, they will need shepherds. This is one of the most pressing arguments for the continuation of the shepherd motif, as Gladwell states, "It is clear, because of our helplessness and out tendency to wander and get lost we are in need of Good Shepherd." Mark Eckel's insistence on navigating ancient terrain need not be heeded. He is wrong to insist that, "Cultural, historical, and political bridges must be crossed by the twenty-first century interpreter in order to fathom the depths of importance "shepherd" brings to a Christian concept of the leadership."

**References**

KJV, Holy Bible

Wright, Walter C., Relational Leadership, 180-181.

Gladwell, “Shepherd Motif in the Old and New,” n.p.

Mark Eckel, “Shepherding: A Biblical Motif for Leadership,” n.p. (cited 12th April 2011).

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