

ARE YOU SURE THAT YOUR SHEPHERD IS NOT A **WOLF** IN DISGUISE?



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A serious examination of the Shepherding
Movement and the Covering doctrine that still
exist in churches worldwide

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True Shepherd Or Wolf?

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Introduction

The way that a young believer, or anyone else for that matter, is shepherded in the local church is crucial for the growth in grace for that believer. When you decide to submit yourself to a mentor; or if a prospective mentor approaches you and offers their services as a “shepherd” and guide for your Christian walk, you need to carefully pray and search the Scriptures to see, firstly, whether you need one, and whether that mentor is right for you.

Because we look on others according to their outward appearance we have no way of knowing what is in their heart. Only God can see that, and so you need the protection of the Holy Spirit in any decision that you make concerning approaching or accepting an approach from a mentor who desires to “shepherd” you. This is because, without the leading of the Holy Spirit, we cannot know whether the person is a true godly shepherd who has your best interests at heart and wishes to point you to a stronger faith in Christ; or whether he is a wolf in disguise seeking to have power and control over your life.

Here are very relevant Scriptures:

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking ⁱⁿ perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”.¹

¹ Acts 20:28-30

“for wicked men are found among My people...they set a trap, they catch men.” Then, “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority.”²

In the 1970³s and 80's a movement emerged from Fort Lauderdale called the “Shepherding Movement”. The five founders of the movement were Don Basham, Charles Simpson, Bob Mumford, Ern Baxter, and Derek Prince. It started with good intentions, but soon developed serious problems. Derek Prince dropped out of it early on after realising his mistake of being involved in it, and Bob Mumford followed suit a short time later, issuing an apology to the Body of Christ and asking forgiveness.⁴

² Jeremiah 5:26, 30-31.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Lauderdale,_Florida

⁴ “The Shepherding/Discipleship Movement - This movement found its doctrinal inspiration in the teaching of two men: (1) Watchman Nee (see his *The Body of Christ*) and (2) Juan Carlos Ortiz (an Argentinian Christian). The need for every believer to be “under authority” and to have “covering” from a “shepherd” in the local church was popularized by a group that came to be known as “The Fort Lauderdale Five” - Bob Mumford, Charles Simpson, Derek Prince, Don Basham, and Ern Baxter.

This movement posed a serious threat to unity within the charismatic wing of the church. The *Shepherding* leaders were denounced publicly by The Full Gospel Businessmen's association, Pat Robertson, and others. Kathryn Kuhlman pointedly refused to appear on the same platform with Bob Mumford, saying: “The man is a heretic.”

In 1989 Bob Mumford issued an apology for the excesses of the movement and any harm for which he was responsible.”

This is what Bob Mumford said as part of his apology:

"Accountability, personal training under the guidance of another and effective pastoral care are needed Biblical concepts . . . [but] these Biblical realities must also carry the limits indicated by the New Testament. However, to my personal pain and chagrin, these particular emphases very easily lent themselves to an unhealthy submission resulting in perverse and unbiblical obedience to human leaders. Many of these abuses occurred within the spheres of my own responsibility. For the injury and shame caused to people, families and the larger body of Christ, I repent with sorrow and ask your forgiveness" (see Christianity Today, March 19, 1990).

As an offshoot of the "Shepherding Movement" the "Covering" doctrine emerged. The definition of these follows in subsequent sections.

The purpose of this book is to examine what the Movement and doctrine actually are and how they came to function in many Pentecostal churches throughout the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, shortly afterward, some New Zealand churches adopted the practice.

After that we will examine selected Scripture references to show the difference between good and corrupted Shepherding and Covering of believers. We need to examine if or what Scriptural basis exists for the Movement and the Doctrine.

What we want to see next is how it relates to the Gospel of Christ and whether it is consistent with it.

<https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/history-of-the-pentecostal-charismatic-movements>

Then we will look at the outcomes in the lives of believers and that state of some churches and fellowships, especially the fellowships that were induced to “come under the Covering” of a prominent Pentecostal denomination.⁵

The Scriptural passage concerning false shepherds will be examined to see how God views them.

An important section will be the signs that a believer is affected by the Covering doctrine, how we can avoid being duped into a false covering, followed by measures that we can take to stand up against the Movement and Doctrine so we are not defeated by it.

Then there will be some concluding remarks that will include some general characteristics of the Pentecostal movement that could provide an opening for enemy invasion.

⁵ I have used the word “Covering” with a capital C to show it is the name of a doctrine.

What Is The “Covering” Doctrine?

It consists in the requirement of a Christian ministry or small fellowship group to be under the “Covering” of a local recognized denominational church, or to be aligned under the name of that denominational organisation. What this means is that the organisation takes over the leadership of the ministry or small fellowship group and makes all the decisions concerning it.

The examples of this are:

The founder and director of a Gospel Ministry desires to become a member of a local Pentecostal church. As a condition of membership and ministry within that church, the pastor and elders of the church takes over the leadership of the ministry and makes all the decisions concerning it. This means that the founder and director of the ministry is required to gain the approval of the church pastor and elders before making any decisions concerning his own ministry.

A small fellowship starts in a home with members from several local churches. It outgrows the space available in the home, and so it moves into a local hall. One member persuades the others that aligning with a local Pentecostal church and taking the denominational name will enhance its ministry in the community and give it greater resources to use. So it agrees to become part that denomination as its “Covering”. What happens is that the leadership of the fellowship is replaced by a pastor appointed by the denomination and from that point on decisions concerning the management and future of the fellowship are placed in the hands of the pastor.

For individual believers in a church, the same “Covering” requirement is applied. Each one is required to be under the “Covering” of a “shepherd” appointed by the church leadership. If the church has aligned itself to the Shepherding Movement⁶, The “Covering” becomes a condition for membership of that church, and those who refuse to comply are effectively “excommunicated” as far as having an active role in the church.

What this meant for an individual under the “Covering” of a “shepherd” was that the latter dictated where that person worked, lived, got their education, whom to marry, and whether or not to go to the doctor if sick. Some even took tithes from their disciples.⁷ Some have called it Accountability, but it merely has the same function for believers and their “shepherds”.

The movement started to spread out into Pentecostal churches in the early 1970^s and continued through the 1980^s, when afterward it began to decline in popularity as many started to see through it as heresy, and complaints started to mount up revealing the extensive harm it was causing to individual Pentecostal and Charismatic believers.

It was primarily a “pyramid” “spiritual covering” linked to the hierarchical style⁸ of some emerging Charismatic churches that

⁶ This is a movement started by the “Fort Lauderdale Five” (Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Charles Simpson, Ern Baxter, Don Basham), that influenced many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the U.S.A., Great Britain and Australia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shepherding_movement

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shepherding_movement under the heading “Pat Robertson’s Opposition, first paragraph.

⁸This is a structure where groups of members are placed under the leadership of a “house group leader”, and the group of house group leaders are placed under an elder for an “associate” pastor, with the group of associate pastors under the leadership of the “senior” pastor who sits at the top of the pyramid. The senior pastor has absolute authority and is usually answerable to no one

grew out of the Charismatic renewal that developed within traditional evangelical churches. One commentator describes the movement linking it with Paul's warning about "grievous wolves" invading the church, as:

"... a new form of legalism entering the church like a flood. They require more of us than Scripture requires. It is a horrible new form of bondage, accomplished in the name of a new church for the 21st century. This is a "transformation" not a "reformation." It would return the church to the dark ages of oppressive State Church. This movement did not arise from God, but from the rapacious desires of evil men".⁹

Another describes the end result of Shepherding:

"...is that it puts the submissive person in a position of having two masters – Jesus Christ and a personal shepherd. Over time the shepherd gains more power and control over the one being shepherded, and Jesus Christ is terribly over-shadowed. In other words, shepherding becomes nothing more than an idolatrous religious system."¹⁰

above him. This makes him a virtual dictator over everyone in the church.

⁹<https://thouarttheman.org/2015/12/26/is-9marks-the-new-shepherding-movement/>

¹⁰<http://thewartburgwatch.com/2009/04/09/the-shepherding-movement-%E2%80%93-reformed-revamped-reee-diculous/>

What Is The Scriptural Warrant For The Covering Requirement?

The principle of “Covering” originates from the book of Ruth.¹¹ She and Naomi were foreigners in the land, and therefore without support, as they had lost their husbands who had died in the land of Moab. A meeting was arranged between Ruth and Boaz and he ended up becoming her husband, and therefore providing cover and support for both women. In its cultural context, the “Covering” was entirely correct and appropriate and ordained of God.

The believer is under the shadow of the Almighty.¹² For the Christian believer, his Covering is God Himself. Under the New Covenant, the Covering of God is called the seal of the Holy Spirit.¹³ This is the protection provided by the genuine believers’ indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul tells the church to be his imitators as he is of Christ.¹⁴ He goes on to explain what that means. This is an important principle for anyone who agrees to perform the role of Shepherd for another. There is nothing wrong with a mature believer mentoring a younger person. It is the abuse that comes out of a power and control attitude that can come into the partnership. A church pastor is the same as a school teacher in terms of one being in a powerful relationship with church members or school students. Problems arise when the relationship is exploited.

¹¹<https://www.grace-life.org/2020/04/ruth-naomi-god-provides-a-Covering1/>

¹² Psalm 91:1_16

¹³ Ephesians 1:13)

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:1-34.

Paul is in a powerful relationship with the Corinthians, but he prevents it turning into a power and control situation by encouraging them to follow him **as he follows Christ**. Therefore he is not imposing his own authority on the members, but is pointing them to Christ and emphasizing that because of the seal of the indwelling Holy Spirit, they effectively have Christ inside of them. Paul is determined not to interfere with the direct access that the believers have to Christ.

Jesus tells His listeners that He can do nothing in Himself and that He doesn't seek His own will but the will of the One who sent Him.¹⁵ This means that Jesus does not impose His will on His disciples. He has come to do His Father's will. So there is a progression: Paul tells the Corinthians to follow Him as He follows Christ, and Christ tells His disciples to follow Him as He follows His Father in heaven. So this leads right back to God the Almighty being the believers' direct Covering, and not even Jesus is going to stand between believers and the Father.

Paul introduces another form of Scriptural Cover: Civil authorities.¹⁶ Although some church authorities exercising power and control use this Scripture to support their dictatorship over people, the context does not include church authorities. We have already seen that genuine church leaders ordained of God have Paul's attitude. They desire that the members follow them as they follow Christ. Power and control church leaders demand obedience because "I am bigger in the church than you and more important therefore you will obey me whether you like it or not." Although we do see power and control in some societies, usually, civil governmental authorities are there to make sure that community members are protected from crime and enabled to live and go about their business in peace.

¹⁵ John 5:30

¹⁶ Romans 13:1

Another interesting account is that of Esther, who found herself in a situation where the Jewish exiles living in the land were under the threat of destruction. Her “Covering” was the king, which came about through God’s providence, that she was placed in her position as consort to the king, to be used of God to affect the rescue of her people. Mordecai saw this and encouraged her by saying:

“Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”¹⁷

The Covering the king provided for her was of God, and she was able to appeal to the king, and he gave permission for the Jewish people to defend themselves against attack.

Another good example of a godly Covering is that of Elijah and Elisha.¹⁸ Elisha had Elijah for his Covering. It was Elisha who had the desire to succeed Elijah his mentor. We see that Elijah did not exercise authority over his disciple. He gave him total freedom to follow his own heart. It seemed that he was testing Elisha’s commitment to the calling of prophet to succeed him in the way he instructed Elisha to remain in certain places while he went on. But he did not stop Elisha from insisting to continue accompanying to where he was going. A false mentor would order Elisha to stay where he was under the threat that if he disobeyed him, he would be disobeying God. But Elijah was a true mentor (shepherd), and an appropriate Covering for Elisha. The result was that when Elijah was caught up to heaven, Elijah took up Elijah’s mantle and continued the prophetic ministry.

The relationship between Paul and Timothy is another example of a godly Covering. Timothy was Paul’s disciple, and Paul provided mentorship for the younger man, encouraging him to

¹⁷ Esther 4:14

¹⁸ 1 Kings 19

not allow others to despise him for his youth.¹⁹ Although Paul gave him plenty of instructions about how he should manage the churches under his bishopric jurisdiction, these were more in the form of recommendations than hard and fast demands. He knew that Timothy was totally capable of managing the churches and gave him guidance, but did not take over the decision-making for Timothy. He gave support and encouragement but allowed Timothy to conduct his ministry as he saw fit.

After Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus to Antioch, Paul became a member of the church at Antioch. He came under the Covering of the prophets and teachers there.²⁰ Notice that when the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to the ministry to which He had for them, He took them out from under the church Covering and He became their Covering.²¹ Notice that the prophets and teachers at Antioch did not dictate to Paul and Barnabas how to conduct their mission, nor did they take over any decision-making connected with it.

A precious example of a Godly Covering was when Jesus was hanging on the Cross, He said to John, "Behold your mother", and to Mary, "Behold your son".²² In this way, the dying Jesus placed His mother under John's Covering. This meant that Mary was cared for and supported by John, when as a widow who had just lost her son, might have been unsupported and destitute.²³

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 4:12

²⁰ Acts 13:1

²¹ Acts 13:2

²² John 19:25-29

²³ Another way of looking at this would be that Jesus placed John under His mother's Covering, seeing that Mary had other sons and daughters besides Jesus. Seeing that John was a young man, separated from family in Galilee, this alternative explanation may be feasible.

In contrast there is the story of the young prophet who destroyed Jeroboam's altar.²⁴ Then the Lord instructed him to go straight home and not to stop anywhere. On his way home, he met an older prophet who invited him to stay the night with him. Because the other prophet was more mature than the young one, the latter decided to stay the night with him. In this way he placed himself under the temporary Covering of the older prophet. This was an inappropriate Covering because it was in disobedience to the Lord's direct command. The next morning the older prophet got a word of knowledge which revealed the disobedience, and as a result, as the young prophet continued on his way, he was met by a lion which killed him. It shows the disastrous results of a godly prophet disobeying the Lord by putting himself under a wrong Covering.

Another undesirable Covering was that of David in King Saul's household. David as a young man was taken under Saul's wing, but as Saul started to "fall from grace", he became jealous of David and the Covering started to deteriorate and David's life became threatened.²⁵ This is an example of a Covering that began with lots of promise and potential but ended up going bad.

So, in summary, Scriptural Covering involves protection, support, assurance, coming directly from God, through the Person of the Holy Spirit within us. Any person adopting the role of shepherd, for a group of people, a church congregation, or single individual must have the mind of Christ.²⁶

An interesting event occurred in the Gentile churches. Certain Jewish apostles came and taught that believers should be circumcised and comply with the Mosaic Law in order to be

²⁴ 2 Kings 23:15

²⁵ 1 Samuel 19

²⁶ Philippians 2:5.

saved.²⁷ Paul opposed this, and he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to have the issue out with the Apostles. The outcome of the conference resulted in Paul and Barnabas' ministry being recognized by the Apostles giving them the right hand of fellowship, and making just three recommendations for the Gentile believers.²⁸

The one thing that is missing is any reference to the Apostles giving direct instructions to Paul and Barnabas about how to conduct their ministry to the Gentiles. They did not impose any kind of Apostolic authority on them in order to take control over the decision-making. They recognized God's calling on their ministry and left them to get on with it.

²⁷ Acts 15:1.

²⁸ Acts 15:22-29

Is The Shepherding/Covering Doctrine Consistent With The Gospel of Christ?

In its uncorrupted form, shepherding a younger convert, and providing covering with the intention of stability, protection, and guidance toward sound doctrine, is quite consistent with the Gospel of Christ.

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”²⁹

The good shepherd leads the sheep: He “leads them out” ([John 10:3](#)). Jesus never coerces us; He invites us to follow Him. A good pastor does not manipulate or threaten the flock. The people have such love and respect for him that they instinctively follow. That is why integrity and consistency represent essential virtues for pastors. Ministers inspire people to follow them whenever the people can trust their shepherd to guide them to green pastures. The pastor understands that he is their shining example.³⁰

So, basically, what is the Gospel of Christ?

It consists of Jesus Christ taking our sin on Himself as He suffered on the Cross, and being raised from the dead to point us to eternal life. As He was raised from the dead, we will likewise be resurrected when Jesus comes again.

²⁹ 2 Timothy 2:2

³⁰ <https://www.biblicalleadership.com/blogs/characteristics-of-a-good-shepherd/>

We are converted to Christ by receiving salvation as a total free gift from God as the result of what Jesus did on the Cross. The Scriptures that support this are:

“Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of works? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”³¹

and

“But to him that works not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”³²

What this means is that because salvation is a free gift, nothing can be added to it. To add anything of ourselves is to insult God by attempting to pay for His gift to us. If one pays for a gift, it is no longer a gift but something earned.

It is one thing to work with a more mature mentor to strengthen your Christian life, to increase your Bible knowledge, even assist in some practical life skills; but it is quite another to have a mentor, or shepherd forced on you by a church that believes that its members require a shepherd's covering to remain a member of the Body of Christ.

This requirement is usually accompanied by the threat that if the member refuses the shepherding from a church-appointed mentor, he is being rebellious and therefore not in unity with “the Body of Christ”. What this means is that the member has to add the shepherd to his Christian walk to ensure that he continues to walk in the Spirit. The church may not admit it openly, but the implication is that the member could lose his salvation if he doesn't have the church-appointed “shepherd” to take control of his personal, work, married, and church life.

³¹ Romans 3:27-29

³² Romans 4:5.

“Many of the movement’s early followers were young people who wanted and needed the discipline the shepherding relationship brought with its concept of authority and submission. Shepherds were to lead their sheep and provide practical guidance on etiquette, personal dress, management, budgeting, and basic home, yard, and automobile care. Moreover, shepherds were to assist ‘people in their financial difficulties, family complications, or similar intricate personal problems. To do so effectively requires an adequate degree of Biblical authority’, Mumford wrote” (Moore, 75).

*“Functionally, for a person to be a committed part of one of their churches required this definite commitment to a shepherd. Consequently, **one was either ‘in or out’, based on one’s willingness to be pastored personally**” (Moore, 75).³³*

Bob Mumford confessed:

*People took something that began in the spirit and attempted to perfect it in the flesh. Ends began to justify the means. The attitude became, ‘I’m going to help you walk straight, even if I have to coerce you.’ **This is not the spirit of the Gospel.**”³⁴*

This shows that the corrupted version of the Shepherding/Covering principle is an insult to God and a departure from the Gospel of Christ. It is tantamount to presenting a different gospel to the one Jesus and Paul presented from the Old Testament Prophecies. Jesus used the

³³<https://jacobyoun84.medium.com/the-shepherding-movement-a-summary-5883c3d27e9f>

³⁴<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-03-24-ca-667-story.html>

same prophecies to enlighten the two disciples who journeyed with Him to Emmaus.³⁵

A leader of an evangelistic mission organisation led a home discipleship group which also involved encouragement to move in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. During that time the organisation transferred to the “covering” of a local Charismatic church and became its “evangelistic arm”. Then the church had a visiting preacher who was one of the “Lauderdale Five” founders of the Shepherding Movement. He taught about the importance of organised mid-week home-groups under a church-appointed leader. Pressure was put on the independent home group leader to transfer the members of his group to one of the “official” home-groups. The leader resisted, and received a telephone call from one of the church elders, that unless he gave up his group in favour of an “official” one, he was separating himself from the Body of Christ. The issue was brought up with the senior elders of the “elder-run” church, and was given permission to continue. But the elder who had made the telephone call, contacted all the members of the group and instructed them to come under “authority”, leave the independent group and join one of the “official” ones.

This was how a successful, Spirit-led group that was a blessing to many young people in the church was destroyed by a church leader obsessed with the Shepherding Movement. The concern is that this church elder used the threat of being separated from the Body of Christ if the leader and members did not comply with his instructions.

The corrupted shepherd’s threats of innocent, vulnerable believers being separated from the Body of Christ for not accepting their corrupted doctrine, show that these “shepherds”

³⁵ Luke 24:13-35

are separating themselves from the true Gospel, bringing destruction on themselves.

“O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid irreverent, empty chatter and the opposing arguments of so-called “knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.”³⁶

³⁶ 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Actual Outcomes Of The Corrupted Covering Doctrine in Pentecostal Churches

After searching the Scriptures for the definition of “Covering” we discover that a shepherd having absolute control over the church and personal life of a believer or group of believers is foreign to Jesus, Paul, Peter and James.

It is also interesting when the group of deacons were appointed to organize care for the church widows, these were not positions of authority over the widows, but were there as support to make sure that their needs were adequately catered for.³⁷

One of the outcomes of the corrupted application of the Covering principle is division into factions. We see this as one of the issues that Paul was alerted to by a letter from Chloe about what was going on in the Corinthian Church.³⁸ Paul sees that some in the church are aligned to Peter, others to Apollos, and others to Christ without regard to either Apollos or Paul, the founders of the church.³⁹ The fact that some are saying, “I follow only Peter” and others say, “I follow only Apollos”, and still others, “I follow only Christ”, shows that the people are ascribing specific authority to Peter and Apollos over and above Christ Himself, and the “Christ” that the third faction were following may not have been the Christ of the Bible, who does not support factions in His Church. *“Is Christ divided?”* Paul reminded the Corinthians.

This is the outcome of faulty shepherding by some leaders in the church, who have directed members to give allegiance to the

³⁷ Acts 6:1-15

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:11

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:12

particular Apostle of their own choosing and make that Apostle the sole authority for their Christian life.

Here is what Bob Mumford stated:

“The delegated authorities in the church serve to mediate God’s rule through their exercise of spiritual authority. By submitting to delegated authority, believers were submitting to Christ” (Moore, 71).⁴⁰

So, a damaging outcome of faulty shepherding is placing a believer, or a group of believers under the “Covering” of a specific leader at the exclusion of all others who could also have a significant contribution to the believer’s spiritual development. This is one of the grievous faults of the pyramid style of church government. Putting a group of believers under the absolute authority of a “house-group leader”, blocking access to other experienced, mature believers in the church, severely limits spiritual development to the maturity and experience of the “leader” who, in many cases, can be less experienced than some in his group.

“The structure of the SM⁴¹ was, in effect, a pyramid scheme for discipleship. A Christian submitted themselves to a shepherd, who took on responsibility for their whole-life discipleship. Additionally, a disciple would tithe to their shepherd directly. A shepherd would generally have no more than 5–10 men (or family units) under his care. This shepherd was under the care of his own shepherd—so on and so forth, with the top 5 leaders of the SM at the top,

⁴⁰ <https://jacobyoun84.medium.com/the-shepherding-movement-a-summary-5883c3d27e9f>

⁴¹ Shepherding Movement

who “mutually submitted to each other”. While not intended (it was modelled after the picture of Jesus with his 12), it was clearly a pyramid scheme focused on discipleship.”⁴²

A group member may feel imprisoned if the leader subscribes to the Shepherding doctrine, and dictates what he is required to do in his personal, professional, and church life, and who he should marry. I have a friend who did not have the confidence to go and buy a pair of trousers at the local department store without first getting permission from his “shepherd”. Another friend was instructed by her “shepherdess” to marry a certain fellow in the church, and the marriage turned out to be a disaster involving domestic violence and eventual desertion, leaving her with four children to bring up alone. That particular church had a high incidence of failed marriages, and I just wonder if those failures were the eventual outcome of faulty advice concerning choice of marriage partner.

A visitor, with years of experience in the prophetic, visited a pyramid church house-group and gave a prophecy. The house-group leader’s supervisor visited and instructed him not to allow the visitor to give prophecies in the group in future.

The Scripture says that there is to be no other mediator between God and man except Jesus Christ.⁴³ What the shepherding abusers do is to insert themselves in between the believer and Christ. What happens is that believers lose their autonomy in their search for God’s will in their lives. This is totally opposed to the Scripture,

⁴² S. David Moore, *The Shepherding Movement: Controversy and Charismatic Ecclesiology*. Quoted in:

<https://jacobyoun84.medium.com/the-shepherding-movement-a-summary-5883c3d27e9f>

⁴³ 1 Timothy 2:5

“Be not unwise but understanding what the will of God is.”⁴⁴

The tragic outcome of allowing a shepherd to have total control over one's life is that when the shepherd falls from grace, such as the church elder I know who was caught in a homosexual encounter, all those shepherded by the person are cut adrift, confused and disillusioned. Many drop right out of the church and away from Christ. One of the most tragic outcomes of the Shepherding doctrine: good believers with excellent potential in the Lord falling right away from Christ and going back into the world.

The problem is that “shepherded” believers are brainwashed into believing that the shepherd has a special link with the Holy Spirit to convey the will of God to them. The truth is that the shepherd knows nothing concerning the will of God for the believer. All he does is use his own wisdom, based on his level of maturity and experience to shepherd the believer.

But the Scripture warns against putting one's total trust in a flesh and blood person:

“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.”⁴⁵

There were some in the Galatian churches who were doubting the validity of Paul's apostleship. But it did not undermine Paul's faith in Christ. This is what he clearly states right at the beginning of his letter to the Galatians:

“...to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ephesians 5:17

⁴⁵ Psalm 146:3

⁴⁶ Galatians 1:16

He said also to the Corinthians that he was called to be an Apostle by the will of God.⁴⁷

Because he was never “ordained” by a church governmental authority, he is in no way obligated to report to any “shepherds” in any of the churches he founded or visited. The only times he felt the need to give his testimony was when he appeared before King Agrippa,⁴⁸ because he recognized Agrippa as the rightful governmental authority; also he gave his testimony to the crowd of Jews at his arrest because he needed to show that he was a Jew like them who had a personal meeting with the risen Christ.⁴⁹

This was not that he was beholding to either Agrippa or the crowd of Jews. He always had mission in mind, and if he could have made a convert out of Agrippa and some from the crowd, then it was worthwhile for him to testify as he did.

This does not mean that one should bare his or her soul to every person who demands it. A prudent person keeps his personal secrets to himself, but a fool “blurts out” the secret “skeletons in the closet” of his personal life.⁵⁰ An unwise person opens himself up and invites a “beating”, and so revealing personal secrets is a snare to his soul.⁵¹

The Shepherding Movement gave rise to “discipleship” camps in the 1970’s-80’s. In one such camp, conducted by a well-known Pentecostal mission organisation, members were required to attend group sessions involving baring the soul through confession to the others in the group. This proved damaging to many in these camps involving such sessions, because of the

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:1

⁴⁸ Acts 26:19

⁴⁹ Acts 22:1-21

⁵⁰ Proverbs 12:23

⁵¹ Proverbs 18:6-7; 21:23

embarrassment and exposure to inappropriate personal counselling by the “shepherds”, often involving casting out of demons, which may not have been there in the first place.

“Given the diversity of the students attending, it seemed plausible that the confessions had been spontaneous and necessary. Later, I learned that these sessions were labelled “Openness and Brokenness,” and that they always begin a DTS (Discipleship Training Seminar). This made me a little suspicious that the staff had engineered the confession time more than the Holy Spirit had. I might not have wondered so much if we had stopped after the first few days. By the third day we did move on to the second step of Intercession, but that did not signal the end of Openness and Brokenness. Throughout the first three months, many hours were specifically set aside for confession and self-exposure, including an eight-hour ordeal focusing on masturbation, lust, and homosexuality. On that particular occasion, we were instructed to place our chairs in a large circle in the lecture room and then had to sit quietly and wait for someone to feel “led by God” and confess. One student commented: “They keep telling us to open up, open up, let everyone see inside of you. They treat me like a number; ‘When is it time for her to burst? I really wonder how she’s doing?’, they say, and disregard what we’re really worth.”⁵²

The training in these DTS is described as “another basic cultic element: rigid, charismatic, and authoritarian.” A distressing example of this is found in the following quote:

⁵² <https://www.spiritualabuseresources.com/articles/my-experience-in-ywam>

*“One day my flock group leader Sally asked me to meet with her later that afternoon in her apartment, and when I arrived I found that Sylvia, the school secretary for whom I worked, was also there. ‘I must be in big trouble,’ I added. Seeing Sally’s face, I shut up and sat down. After a few moments of silence, Sally proceeded to tell me that I would no longer be working in a secretarial position but would instead be a member of the dish crew. I sat there silently, staring at the window and listening to them tell me that God had ordained this. **Sally had ‘received a word from the Lord’** during Intercession. ‘You have not been spending enough time with the other students, and working in the office has further isolated you.’ I made several attempts to reply but failed. As I studied the curtains, my thoughts turned to God and I found that I had much to say to Him. ‘Is this true? Why didn’t you tell me? What is going on?’ God didn’t answer.*

*Bracing myself, I left the refuge of looking out the window and faced the two women who professed to know God’s will for me. I questioned them intensely, seeking to understand their reasons. I knew that they were not aware of the time I had spent with my roommates or that working in the office had given me more time with some of the staff. **Refusing to take responsibility for the decision**, they **repeatedly ascribed it to God**, adding that it was with God and the virtues of Intercession that their authority lay. Lacking personal proof of God’s will for me in this matter, I acquiesced. As I left the room, my confidence in my ability to hear God **had been***

***undermined** by their very confidence in being able to do so.”⁵³*

The brainwashing starts with a benevolent concern for the “targets” who are lulled into complying with the belief that the shepherd actually cares for them. If the subject resists in any way, the benevolent “concern” becomes more intense with the implication that their care and concern is not being reflected back through willing compliance. If resistance continues then more direct pressure is exerted with Bible verses concerning obedience which are carefully adapted to cause intense feelings of guilt, and the fear that by not complying, the subject is resisting the Holy Spirit and therefore bringing condemnation on him or herself.

Often, it can take years for the believer to realize that brainwashing has occurred, and often intervention by Christian friends or family is needed to break the bond and guide the believer to freedom. But it can take years for the believer to be “de-programmed” to be fully set free from the deep sense of obligation to the shepherd⁵⁴ and the intense guilt of perceived “disobedience”.

⁵³ <https://www.spiritualabuseresources.com/articles/my-experience-in-ywam>, chapter heading “God's Will and Authoritarianism”. To be fair to YWAM, this information has come from a site majoring in spiritual abuse and is skewed toward reporting cultish conduct. YWAM had group leaders coming from a range of churches and I suspect that this might have happened under a group leadership from a Shepherding Movement oriented church situation, and that believers attending other DTS would not have been subjected to this type of abuse.

⁵⁴ Some would view it as a “soul bond” which may need a form of deliverance to set the person free from it.

I know a person in my last Charismatic Church who felt that God was leading him into the ministry and he was waiting on God for direction. He was invited to preach in a Pentecostal church outside of his own church, As a result of the message he gave in that church, the pastor gave an invitation to sponsor him for training for the ministry of that other Pentecostal denomination. This was a great opportunity, but because his own church was heavily influenced by the Shepherding doctrine at that time, he made the mistake of asking one of the elders of the church for advice. The elder told him not to go ahead with the offer. Because of immaturity, the person lost a valuable opportunity which would have enabled him to make a valuable contribution to the Body of Christ.

It is very interesting that many who have been “stung” by the Shepherding Movement were young, relatively immature novices in the faith, having just an unsure knowledge of the Bible, of true exegesis of Scripture and lacking the skills of competent hermeneutic Bible interpretation that more mature believers possess. I have reason to believe that those mature believers who know their Bibles and who are people of prayer, knowing the voice of the Holy Spirit, would never be deceived by the Shepherding “Covering” doctrine.

Being an elder, pastor, or shepherding mentor in the Body of Christ is a very powerful and responsible position, and young converts to Christ tend to see them as being able to hear God’s voice more clearly than themselves. Therefore in the early stages of discipleship, they tend to put their trust in anyone they see as more experienced. The problem is that in the Pentecostal Church any untrained person can be a mentor or counsellor and a young convert would not be able to distinguish between a competent mentor and a faulty one.

Here is an account of someone who started under the wrong “Covering” but eventually was led by the Spirit to a true Covering which was right for him. I have a friend who was only a convert for one year and was mentored by someone who was disillusioned with all the Pentecostal churches and constantly referred to them as “dead”. He was very legalistic in his views which rubbed off on my friend. He and his mentor belonged to a Pentecostal Church in the city, and when the mentor’s favourite pastor left, he took all the young ones, including my friend, out of that church and started his own one in a school hall. They went with him because they believed he was right. The mentor teamed up with another mature believer and they shared the ministry. But the other believer disagreed with the mentor and they split up, and that was the end of that independent church. The outcome for my friend was that he could not join any Pentecostal Church in the city because he was brainwashed into thinking they were all dead as far as the Holy Spirit was concerned, and he felt very legalistic toward those who did not come up to the mentor’s standards. Then the mentor left the city, leaving him high and dry. Fortunately, he found a contact in a Pentecostal Church in another city that had a good reputation for Holy Spirit ministry, so he relocated and found himself under the ministry of a mature and experienced pastor who disciplined him in the correct way.

So it is possible to reclaim for the Lord those who have been led astray by false shepherds who have provided the wrong “Covering” for them. The following is an examination of the Scripture passage involving false shepherds,

False Shepherds Jeremiah 23:1-4⁵⁵

1*“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! declares the LORD.”*

What we see right at the start of the passage is that false shepherds destroy and scatter believers causing churches to split, and cause church members to not only abandon the church, but also abandon Christ as well. This is especially true of immature novices who are unable to distinguish between their church and Christ. They are unable to see that Christ is a separate entity to their church, and so abandoning the church for them is the same as abandoning their faith in Christ.

Also the Lord makes special mention of the “sheep of **My** pasture.” This shows that the church does not belong to the elders and pastors of it. It is the Lord’s Church and it is to Him that every knee shall bow. When the false shepherds insert their own authority between the believer and Christ, they are usurping a position where Christ alone has the exclusive right.

“Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the shepherds who tend My people: “You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your deeds, declares the LORD.”

Now the Lord shows that He is speaking directly through the prophet about these false shepherds. He repeats that believers

⁵⁵ Although the passage directly refers to Judah facing ruin and destruction through the assurances of false prophets and godless kings, the principle is still valid concerning false shepherds and prophets in our modern Pentecostal churches.

in a church are **His** people, not the shepherds'. He is saying that He is the peoples' own Covering and there is no other Covering. Therefore any Covering the false shepherds apply to the people is as false as they are.

Exerting a false authority and forcing the people to come under a false Covering has the effect of scattering them and driving them away from the sanctuary of the church. Church shepherds have a responsibility to attend to and serve the people of God, and therefore are accountable to God for the way they fulfil their role. God promises these false shepherds that because they have not covered the people as God would have them do, He will come and attend to them, but not in the way they would desire of Him. The Lord sees their deeds as evil and He will exercise judgment as He will with all evil ones who have rejected Christ.

"Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands to which I have banished them, and I will return them to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or dismayed, nor will any go missing, declares the LORD."

But there is a way back from the distress and harm that is caused by requiring people to put themselves under the Covering of false shepherds. The Lord Himself will step in and expose these evil ones for who they really are.

Here is an interesting point: the Lord says that He has banished the people to other "lands". I am not going to try to speculate what those "other lands" are in the context of today's religious environment. The point is that the Lord has removed the injured ones to protect them from further harm and put them in churches where the "Covering" is more consistent with what the Lord has designed for them. Others have abandoned the church

completely and involved themselves in home and work pursuits. The Lord has promised that the day will come when He will gather all these “exiles” and bring them back into a place where they can walk in the Spirit and be effective for Christ.

This is not to say that they will be returned to the self-same church they had to abandon, but in which church they are, their faith in Christ will be renewed and they will be a blessing to that church leadership in a “refurbished” ministry for the Lord. Those who had abandoned the church altogether will be drawn back to a supportive, Godly fellowship where their faith in Christ will be rebuilt.

To the injured and distressed believer, it may seem that the leadership of all Pentecostal Churches are the same, and because of this many have abandoned the Pentecostal Movement, vowing never to return to a Pentecostal or Charismatic Church. But the truth is what was revealed to Elijah in the depth of his depression when he despaired of life.

“Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”⁵⁶

What this shows in our current context is that there are Pentecostal and Charismatic Pastors and Leaders who are true shepherds who reflect Christ’s care for the people, and who have not bowed the knee to the “Baal” of the false Covering of the Shepherding Movement. For those who desire to return to a Pentecostal Church environment, the Holy Spirit will lead them back to an appropriate church fellowship where they can serve the Lord without fear or discouragement.

For those who choose to remain in their Evangelical Church, the Lord will make sure that they are promoted to useful service for

⁵⁶ 1 Kings 19:18

Him. A good point to make is that a believer in a large Pentecostal Church, having his skills under-used and being little more than a “pew-sitter”, while “under the thumb” of a godless Covering, may flee the church and find himself in a smaller Evangelical Church that needs just the skills he has. To his joy, he finds a much wider scope of opportunity to effectively serve the Lord in his new church environment.

I have found this true in my experience. When I fled my last Charismatic Church I found myself in an Anglican Church where I was put to work teaching Sunday School right away. A couple of years later I joined a Baptist Church in another city, and was soon made a deacon and wrote Christian plays for the youth group. Some years later, in another city, I joined a Presbyterian Church and immediately taught Sunday School, became a member of the choir, and soon became an elder and treasurer of the church, taking worship services and preaching every six weeks or so. This was a role I held for 23 years. Moving to another city for my retirement, God led me to a small Union Church where my worship leading, property management, and music skills were in demand and are being well-used.

The “none will go missing” shows that no one who has the desire to go on for Christ wherever they are, will not miss out on all that Christ has for them.

The Signs of Being Under A False Covering

The most obvious sign is the demand by any church leader or mentor that “you must be under our/my Covering in order to remain a full member of the Body of Christ”. The Lord will never make that demand on you. You have total freedom of choice whether you want to be under the Covering of and accountable to a mentor, shepherd or discipler, or whether you want a mentor at all.

If anyone, even a church pastor says, “You must come under my authority”, reject it immediately. The Holy Spirit will never support such a demand. We, as Christians, are not in the military. We don’t have to take “orders” from anyone. I know that we have different levels of experience and maturity in the church, and that different people have different roles for the orderly running of the church. However, a pastor’s or elder’s role is one of responsibility, not authority over people.

Power and control are not part of the church leader’s role. Jesus gave His Apostles authority over sickness, disease and demons, but not over other believers. Every believer is a king and priest under Christ, and in that sense, we are all equal in standing with God. But equality does not mean anarchy.

Pastors and elders are appointed by the members who recognize their experience and maturity in the Lord. This is the way the Holy Spirit guides a congregation to recognize who are the fit people to lead the church. Paul was quite clear that novices in the faith not be appointed to a leadership position lest

that he be lifted up with pride and fall into the condemnation of the devil.⁵⁷

The other sign of a false Covering is having mature, experienced believers under the leadership of a novice in the faith in a pyramid style of church government where there is a hierarchy of “authority” that must be adhered to. There is nothing wrong with being a member of a home or Church Bible Study Group led by a younger believer, where the latter recognizes and respects those mature believers in the group. A good group leader functions like the chairperson of a committee, who has just one vote along with the others, and has the prime role of making sure the proceedings are conducted decently and in order. But he does not dictate who should speak in the group and what they should say, and he is not the arbiter of doctrine, but allows the Bible to have that role in the group.

The next sign is a mentor starting to interfere into the believer’s personal life. Although there are times when a mentor feels the need to give guidance if the believer is doing something that may be harming himself or bringing the church into disrepute, he has no right to make value judgments about the way the believer conducts his or her personal life outside of the church.

A false mentor will insist that you come under his or her Covering, and then start to interfere with your personal, work, and family life. The mentor will start to dictate who your friends will be, the type of job, who you will marry, which church you should attend, what educational institution to attend, and even if you should or should not go to the doctor if you become sick. The mentor will get you so much under control that you will not be able to make any decisions without referring to him or her first. This means that your life is no longer your own, but the mentor’s.

⁵⁷ 1 Timothy 3:6

If you start to question the level of control the mentor has over you, they will quote Scripture, mainly out of direct context, to prove that the mentor is being led of the Holy Spirit to guide you, and that the Holy Spirit is speaking to them about what you must decide. The Scriptures quoted will most probably contain threatening for not following all the mentor's instructions.

It is important at this stage to know that someone who knows the Bible well and is a prayerful believer, will quickly realize that the mentorship is faulty and that the "shepherd" is not hearing from God at all, and that the Scriptures quoted are out of context.

A believer with a "Berean" attitude⁵⁸ will not be quickly fooled by a false shepherd. It is usually those who have a limited knowledge of the Bible and are unsteady in the faith that are the ones most vulnerable to false mentors and shepherds, and is more likely to put themselves under a false Covering.

If you are in a fellowship, prayer, or Bible Study Group in your church, and there is pressure placed on you to confess your sins to the group, especially the intensely personal ones, then you can know that you are being scammed by those who are intending to have power and control over you.

You are not obliged to make any public confession of sin at all. The requirement by the group is a mis-quote of "*confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed*".⁵⁹ Notice that it is the decision of the sick person to call for the elders of the church, not the other way around.⁶⁰

Therefore, the initiative to receive prayer, and to confess sins is on the part of the believer, and not through insistence by a group or any member of it. This is where important parts of a Scripture

⁵⁸ Acts 17:11

⁵⁹ James 5:16

⁶⁰ James 5:14

passage are left out to make it appear that one must confess their sins publicly on demand.

Another sign is someone coming to you with a “word of knowledge from the Lord” giving you instructions about what you must do, a decision you need to make, or for the person to become your spiritual guide, or to make decisions for you concerning an issue that they “see in the Spirit”.

You need not to act on any “word of knowledge” until the Lord speaks personally to you as confirmation. You should treat any unsolicited guidance “word of knowledge” or prophecy with suspicion and be aware that it could contain a divination spirit which can attack you spiritually or physically.⁶¹

By the way, to recognize if you are in a Pentecostal or Charismatic Church with a pyramid governmental style, is to organise an appointment with a senior elder or the pastor to discuss an issue. If they are glad to see you and discuss the matter, then you are in a church where there is no power and control type of hierarchy.

But if the elder or pastor directs you back to your house-group leader to discuss the issue, and insists on it even though you try to explain that you believe the leader is not mature enough to

⁶¹ This has definitely been known to happen – where a preacher received a prophecy promising wealth and fame, which didn’t immediately seem relevant to him so he put it on the ‘back burner’ to wait and see if the Lord was going to confirm it. Then he developed severe back pain which was not relieved even after two operations. Then he was warned about false prophecies containing spirits of divination that could attack physically, and so he renounced the prophecy, and immediately the back pain disappeared.

give you a reliable answer, then you can know that you are part of a pyramid church government with an authoritarian hierarchy.

Attendance at the public meetings of the church will not reveal the governmental structure, but as soon as you become a “bonded-in” member, you will be assigned to a study or home group under the authority of a church-appointed leader.

How to Avoid Being Duped Into A False Covering

There are some safety measures that you can adopt to lessen vulnerability to spiritual scams, including being duped into coming under a false Covering.

Read and study your Bible until you have an intimate knowledge of God's plans and purposes contained in both the Old and New Testaments. Carefully study passages of Scripture within their contexts, because good exegesis of Scripture involves the context in which it is written, who wrote it, how the initial readers understood it, and the purpose for which it was written. Through this, we can determine whether a passage of Scripture is culture limited (to the culture in which it was first written), or trans-cultural (applicable to all cultures, then and now).

Maintain an honest and lively prayer life with the Lord. This is more than giving God your "Christmas list", or reciting the Lord's Prayer from time to time. It is opening your heart to the Lord and expressing yourself honestly and openly to Him. If you want to hear His voice often, He needs to hear your voice more often.

One thing I need to say is that God will never say directly to you anything that He has not already said in the written Scriptures. The Holy Spirit works in tandem with the written Scriptures, and when people depart from the Scriptures they tend to get their guidance by "revelation" and "words of knowledge". But without a comprehensive knowledge of the written Scriptures, there is no basis of confirmation whether the "revelation" or "word of knowledge" is actually true, and those who depend on "revelation" for their spiritual guidance usually end up in confusion and disarray in their spiritual lives.

Reject any personal prophecy that promises future fame, health or wealth. I know that the Scripture promises health and prosperity⁶² but John is speaking of spiritual, not physical health or material prosperity. We can be totally healthy in our spirit, while physically sick, and we can be prosperous in our walk in the Spirit while having hardly a “Brass Razoo” to our name.

Don’t allow yourself to be bonded into a pyramid style church unless you are strong in your faith and commitment to Christ so that you can successfully resist the pressure to “come under” a Covering of any person or group in the church. If you become a member of a Home Group or Bible Study Group, make sure that you know that you can respect the role of the leader but not his authority over you.

If you feel the need to escape from a church that is putting undue pressure on you to “come under” its Covering, and the pressure is causing you stress, then don’t be afraid to join a non-Pentecostal or Charismatic Church in your area. You will find that most denominational churches contain many folk who love the Lord, and although they lack knowledge in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, they are committed to winning souls for Christ.

In deciding which church to join, go along to a couple of Sunday Services and listen carefully to what is preached from the pulpit. If you find that the preaching is Scripturally sound and Christ-centred, then you are in a safe church.

However, don’t try and hide your Pentecostal background or theology, but at the same time don’t push it to them. You will find that they will accept you as one of the hard core of the church if you are prepared to get to work and use your skills to support its ministry. You may find that once you are well known and not

⁶² 3 John 2

trying to turn them into Pentecostals, they may very well want to know more about how the Spiritual Gifts function.

Usually it is because of a lack of knowledge that holds people back from operating the Spiritual Gifts, and the fear that something unusual or embarrassing may happen to them. Once they see you as a normal, down-to-earth person, not given to excess, the “spookiness” of the idea of Spiritual Gifts may decrease. But don’t try to rush things. Good things take time to develop. “Through faith and patience we inherit the promises”.⁶³

Be careful of Discipleship Training Seminars. Make sure that you know what you are getting into before committing yourself, especially if it means travelling abroad to attend one. If you find yourself trapped in something that is causing you stress through pressure to confess personal sins, or to accept “words of knowledge”, or authoritarian leaders, then it may be difficult to disengage if you are in a foreign country.⁶⁴

To be fair, not all discipleship training is authoritarian. It depends on the leaders who are running it; and not all Christian camps are like concentration camps.⁶⁵

⁶³ Hebrews 6:12

⁶⁴ A friend and her husband travelled to Germany (halfway around the world from New Zealand), to a D.T.S., and they arrived early in the evening exhausted and hungry. They described the German receptionist as a modern equivalent of a German concentration camp guard, who refused to give them a meal, and treated them in a very authoritarian manner. They wondered if they had made an error in their directions and ended up in accommodation that was not Christian at all! I don’t think they had a very good experience at that place, and wondered whether they wasted their time and money going there.

⁶⁵ I fully support the Prophetic Training camps conducted in the lower South Island of New Zealand, in Africa and other parts of

What Can We Do?

What comes to mind right away are the following Scriptures:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”⁶⁶

And:

“For though we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We tear down arguments and every presumption set up against the knowledge of God; and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”⁶⁷

What these Scriptures show us is that we are up against spirits that are not of God. If we try to fight them with natural resources, we will fail. It will be like taking on a Sherman tank with the pop-gun. We can shout and yell, rebuke and rail against the spirits until we are “blue in the face”, but that will have no effect. We can get up and preach against the counterfeit teaching and manifestation, but our words will just fall flat against the spiritual forces that are arrayed against the church.

the world, conducted by The Gospel Faith Messenger Ministry. These training centres involve mature teachers, experienced in the prophetic, and are run on an equipping, encouraging, non-authoritarian basis.

⁶⁶ Ephesians 6:12

⁶⁷ 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

But we have powerful weapons that we can use and these are found here:

“Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”⁶⁸

So, let's unpack the passage and see how we can use these weapons to provide a protective Covering for ourselves, and to fight and win against the “grievous wolves” that are invading our churches.

Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

To be effective against the godless spiritual forces we need to have the whole armour of God and not have just part of it, if we are to withstand in what is being an evil day for our churches. The reason why some churches have gone under, is that they have not had enough practical knowledge of the armour and the enemy has entered through the cracks where a piece of armour is missing.

Also, we can do all we are able to make inroads into enemy territory and where there is a limit to our advance, we have to be able to make a stand at our new line of defence.

⁶⁸ Ephesians 6:13-18

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth,

The first components of our armour enable us to make a stand and not be forced to retreat when the enemy counter-attacks. The belt of truth stands for knowing sound doctrine through a thorough exegetical study of the Scriptures and knowing what is written for us, and what is written to us as direct instruction.

We need to establish through study of the cultural and historical context who wrote the Scripture, who was the intended reader, why it was written, and how the reader at the time of writing understood it. In this way, we can establish the truth of our doctrine. I

It is when random verses are taken out of context to form the basis of doctrine, that errors and falsehood enter into the teaching, and that part of the armour is rendered ineffective. It's like taking one's belt off and his pants fall down. Many have been caught with their pants down because they have misinterpreted Scripture by not giving thorough study to it.

having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

The breastplate covers the heart. Righteousness is in the heart. It is the heart that God looks at, while man looks at the outward appearance. The righteousness that is here is not self-righteousness that comes through moral living. It is the righteousness of Christ that has been given to us as a free gift from God.

It protects the new heart of flesh that has replaced the heart of stone. The heart is exposed when believers start looking at their own spiritual state and begin looking at the level of their own righteousness. When they reach a particular standard of moral uprightness, they gain the mistaken impression that they have 'arrived', allowing the enemy to get through and corrupt the heart.

King Asa did not do everything perfectly but his heart was true before God.⁶⁹

¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace

The Gospel of Christ is a very powerful component of the Christian armour. It enables the believer to have strength in his lower legs and feet to be able to make his stand against the onslaught of the enemy. Paul says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because it is the power of God leading to salvation to those who believe.⁷⁰

The most powerful way to advance into the enemy's territory is to preach the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit as He works with the preaching with signs following as happened in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit working alongside the preaching of the Gospel overturned the pagan Roman Empire and Christianized it.

The same can happen in our neo-pagan societies if the same Gospel with the same power of the Holy Spirit is preached.

¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Faith is believing the Word of God and being prepared to turn that faith into action. Faith is the shield that protects the believer from "the condemnation bombs" that the enemy throws at him. Faith stops the believer from falling into discouragement and despair. Faith is not a force in itself. Some use faith in a way that is similar to witchcraft and sorcery. But here the Scripture does not treat faith like that. It is a shield and not an offensive weapon.

⁶⁹ 2 Chronicles 15:17

⁷⁰ Romans 1:16

¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation,

The helmet protects the head, that is, the mind. If the believer has full assurance of salvation, then the enemy's attacks on his mind and emotions are foiled. What holds the helmet on the head is the verse: *"By grace are we saved through faith, not of ourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any should boast"*⁷¹

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

This is the offensive weapon that we use to counter-attack the enemy when he comes to invade our space. Jesus used Scripture to defeat Satan's suggestions.⁷² But this is more than just quoting Scripture at the enemy.

What makes the Word of God powerful is when the Holy Spirit works with it. Separate the Holy Spirit from the Scripture and all that remains is just words in a book. A preacher can preach sermons from the Scriptures 99 times with little observed effect on his listeners, but on the 100th time, the Holy Spirit speaks through the Scripture as it is being preached and the pastor has a revival on his hands.

It is interesting that when I am considering an issue and asking God questions about, a Scripture verse comes to mind that provides the exact answer. That is the Holy Spirit working with Scripture to make it come alive to us as a "rhema" word. We can be witnessing for Christ to an unsaved person and not making much progress until we show him a certain Scripture and suddenly he is enlightened, convicted of sin and receives Christ as Saviour. We would have quoted several Scriptures

⁷¹ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁷² Mark 1:12-15

beforehand, but that particular Scripture is the one that breaks through to his heart.

praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints

This is the foundation for the strength of the other components of the Christians armour. Prayer is direct communication with God. It doesn't have to be fancy words to show that we know the English language, because the Lord knows what we have need of before we even ask Him.⁷³ It is because the indwelling Holy Spirit knows what is already on our hearts.

Also, prayer with the Spirit and with the understanding was the foundation of Paul's prayer life that enabled him to write under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, resulting in his letters becoming Holy Scripture. Praying with the Spirit is praying in tongues. Using this Holy Spirit "tool" enables us to pray without ceasing, and to be able to pray when we can't find the right words in English to express ourselves. Jude also refers to praying in the Spirit when he said:

*"But you, beloved, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit."*⁷⁴

The devil hates prayer, especially prayer in tongues, because he knows that a praying believer is a serious threat to his plans and purposes in the world. He will do everything to discourage praying, and will distract the believer in any way he can. All we have to see are the constant arguments and conflicts concerning the gift of tongues to show that the devil has a problem with it.

⁷³ Matthew 6:8

⁷⁴ Jude 1:20

He has deceived large sections of the church with his Cessationist doctrine.

If he can get Christians to get into unbelief concerning tongues, and the other Supernatural Gifts of the Spirit, then he can limit the power of the Holy Spirit in the same way that unbelief in Jesus' home town stopped Him from doing any mighty works there.⁷⁵ But the key is that we should pray without ceasing and not give up.⁷⁶

The nine gifts of the Spirit are for building up the Body of Christ. They are Holy Spirit tools for believers to use among themselves and for the unsaved they come into contact with. But the armour of God is for our fight against the enemy. Wearing the armour, using the sword of the Spirit, and engaging in unceasing all-prayer with the Spirit and the understanding, will protect us and our church from invasion of the enemy with his counterfeits.

⁷⁵ Matthew 13:58

⁷⁶ Luke 18:1

Conclusion

The Shepherding Movement and the Covering doctrine were conceived with good intentions at first, to counter the decline of personal holiness, discipleship, and commitment to Christ in Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches. The intention was to team younger converts to mature, experienced believers in the local church to provide mentoring and assistance in spiritual growth, Bible knowledge and use of the Spiritual Gifts. The founders of the movement believed that it was an effective way for new converts to develop in their spiritual walk without them having to leave their local church for Bible College Training. It was a recognition that there were valuable human resources in local churches that could be of real value to young Christian converts.

The Covering principle involved ensuring that young converts were not left to try and cope alone with the “ins and outs” of church life. It was designed as protection, encouragement and support from mature mentors, support groups, and ministry leaders. The principle also provided support for small Independent Fellowships with limited resources to link in with a larger church that would provide material and ministry resources to the smaller fellowship.

So the movement and principle were good and holy in themselves, just like the Mosaic Law. But as with the Law, they fell on their side because of the sinfulness of some who corrupted it through power and control-based attitudes and practices.

There is nothing wrong with having a shepherd to support you in your local church, but you must insist that it is on the basis of

encouragement, equipping, and empowering to develop strength in your faith in Christ. Good shepherding is called Pastoral Care in many churches. Richard Baxter was a 17th Century English Puritan divine who believed that good pastoral care involved regular visiting of parishioners in their homes. He believed that this formed the basis of a strong, godly, Christ-centred membership. His book *The Reformed Pastor*, is a Christian classic.⁷⁷ If you can cope with the 17th Century language, you will find it a very interesting and informative book.

However, as the 1970s wore on, and as the Shepherding Movement spread throughout the U.S.A., the U.K., Australia and New Zealand, the cracks in the frame work started to appear with emerging testimonies of young converts leaving Pentecostal Churches after being subjected to conditions where they were unable to make personal decisions without having to get authorisation from their “shepherd”.

They testified of extreme emotional harm, broken marriages after being told who to marry, working at jobs they hated because their mentor told them where to work, and forced separation from their families because they were unconverted and therefore a bad influence on the young convert. Some compared the treatment they got with what they heard about the “Moonies”.⁷⁸

The frightening outcome of an authoritarian shepherding system is what happened at Jonestown in Guyana.⁷⁹ Jim Jones started his church as an ordinary Pentecostal Pastor, but as his church

⁷⁷ <https://banneroftruth.org/us/store/church-ministry/the-reformed-pastor/>

⁷⁸[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification_movement#:~:text=The%20Unification%20movement%2C%20also%20known,sometimes%20colloquially%20called%20%](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification_movement#:~:text=The%20Unification%20movement%2C%20also%20known,sometimes%20colloquially%20called%20%22Mooni)

⁷⁹<https://www.britannica.com/event/Jonestownes%22.22Mooni>

grew, he became more authoritarian in his management, and his people accepted it because of his charismatic character. The people ended up being so brainwashed that they were induced to commit mass suicide. The tragic aspect was that many were not as brainwashed and refused, but were forced to drink the poison at gunpoint.

This shows that any normal Pentecostal Church with the wrong type of leadership can start developing in that direction. This is why leaders and members of Pentecostal Churches should be sober and vigilant⁸⁰ to spot the initial trend toward authoritarian shepherding and Covering and to nip it in the bud before it festers into something that becomes a major issue in their church.⁸¹

In one situation where I was personally involved, a fellowship with 80 members in a small town was taken over by a prominent Pentecostal denomination. The head “apostle” and his “prophet” were invited to a Sunday meeting by a senior member of the small fellowship, who was committed to the “Covering” doctrine, and convinced the others that taking the name of the Pentecostal denomination would be good for them. The “apostle” preached about the importance of “Covering”, and then the “prophet” went around giving personal prophecies to many in the congregation, reiterating what the “apostle” had already preached. I remember praying, “Lord, don’t let that guy come anywhere near me!” So the “prophet” avoided me.

⁸⁰ 1 Peter 5:8

⁸¹ I have concerns about the Life Church organisation in New Zealand. I know of two churches that have an authoritarian, “Covering” type of pyramid government structure. I know of one senior pastor who is very influential in that movement who tends toward legalistic and authoritarian form of managing church members.

The fellowship became a church of that Pentecostal denomination, and a pastor was appointed. It was soon discovered that he was not very competent, and the church started bleeding members out of it. In one service, I gave a prophecy, and the pastor took hold of me and demanded that I come under his authority. I flatly refused in front of everyone, and walked out of the service. Within around nine months the church declined from having 80 members to just 25. Before the year ended, it closed its door permanently.

I heard that the senior fellowship member, who trained as a pastor in that denomination, aspired to become the denominational pastor of that fellowship once he was trained, but once he was trained, the fellowship had basically declined to nothing and was about to close its doors. I heard that he ended up being a broken man.

Such is the outcome of the false “Covering” doctrine for an initially successful fellowship, winning souls for Christ and on the people who belonged to it with high hopes of having a strong church in their community, and on a mature Christian believer who was promised good things but ended up receiving nothing but a waste of his training and no ongoing ministry anywhere in that denomination.

So, now, the Shepherding Movement, and the Covering doctrine has largely been discredited with a reputation for destroying churches and believers’ lives throughout the countries where it became part of Pentecostal Churches.⁸²

Jack Hayford, a well-known Charismatic Pastor says:

“hundreds of pastors, like myself, have spent large amounts of time over the past 15 years picking up the

⁸² But there is a core group led by Charles Simpson still operating in the United States and elsewhere.

pieces of broken lives that resulted from distortion of truth by extreme teachings and destructive applications on discipleship, authority and shepherding.”⁸³

There is a pseudo-christian community on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand that is structured as an authoritarian, exclusive religious commune. This extreme version of Shepherding and Discipleship is worst of all because it keeps its members by telling them that if they leave the commune they will lose their salvation. No one is permitted to make decisions of their own, they must work in the commune as directed, have no contact with anyone outside including family and friends, and can only marry within the commune, and only married to whom the leaders decide for them. The children who were born in the commune 20 years ago have no idea what life is like on the outside. All they know is commune life. All they know of Christian doctrine is what the leaders teach them, and that is skewed towards the “Jesus Only” doctrine.⁸⁴

⁸³<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-03-24-ca-667-story.html>

⁸⁴ **Jesus Only**, movement of believers within **Pentecostalism** who hold that true **baptism** can only be “in the name of Jesus” rather than in the name of the Trinity. It began at a Pentecostal **camp meeting** in California in 1913 when one of the participants, John G. Scheppe, experienced the power of the name of Jesus. Many accepted his revelation, and they found support for their belief in “Jesus Only” baptism in John 3:5 and **Acts** 2:38. This led to the denial of the traditional doctrine of the **Trinity** and to the assertion that Jesus is the one Person in the Godhead. The theological controversy split the Pentecostals and led to the establishment of new churches. See also **Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc.**; **United Pentecostal Church, Inc.**

There are startling and frightening comparisons with Jonestown, and there is the real possibility that if the government stepped in because of the reports of unsafe work practices, sexual abuse of children, that there could be a similar outcome to what happened at Jonestown. What is another serious concern is that there is a very limited gene pool, and if members keep marrying and having children within that gene pool, birth deformities could invariably result.

The Pentecostal Movement has many excellent features, and when based on sound doctrine and Biblical practices there is nothing superior, in my view. It represents the restoration of the Supernatural Spiritual Gifts that were common in the First Century Early Church. But then, I am biased!

But with every powerful Spirit-filled Movement, there is the potential for “grievous wolves” to invade. In its early stages, in the early to mid-Twentieth Century, the Gifts of the Spirit manifested powerfully, resulting in multitudes of souls being saved. But as time went on counterfeits appeared, such as uncontrolled public babbling in “pseudo-tongues” bringing the gift of tongues into disrepute; false predictive prophecies that never came to pass; “voices” giving revelation that is never found in the Scriptures; sensual, hypnotic suggestive music that induced a trance-like state in worshipers, or music that hyped up members into frenzy of shaking, jerking, falling over and uncontrolled convulsive laughter; teaching that believers can become ‘gods’, guaranteed healing by faith while symptoms are still obvious. All these were unknown in the early Twentieth Century Pentecostal Movement.

It seems that the genuine Biblical signs and wonders are being pushed to the background, while the spurious, counterfeit ones are pushed to prominence in the public arena.

In the same way, what started off as genuine and with good intentions, the Shepherding Movement and the Covering doctrine, degenerated during the late 1970's and 1980's. It transformed into the authoritarian, imprisoning, emotionally distressing, church-splitting corruption that it became.

Some modern offshoots of it still exist in some churches even today. This is a serious concern for young converts to unwittingly join those churches and become imprisoned within a heresy that will ultimately cause them more harm than good.

The following show that the Covering requirement has not gone away, even now:

However, the Shepherding Movement continues today under the leadership of Charles Simpson, who prefers to call it the "Covenant Movement." His ministry is based in Mobile, Alabama.

Unbeknownst to many Christians, shepherding has been "reformed" and "revamped" and may be coming to a church near you. Your church may even be putting it into practice – you just haven't been able to recognize it. We are alarmed at this growing movement within Christian orthodoxy, and we can hardly wait to share with you our startling findings in some upcoming posts.⁸⁵

"One couple said they were confronted for missing an impromptu barbeque with their gospel community in order to spend planned family time with their kids. They were accused of not putting the mission of the church first. Several who took interest in ministry opportunities outside the mission for their gospel community—which could shift

⁸⁵<http://thewartburgwatch.com/2009/04/09/the-shepherding-movement-%E2%80%93-reformed-revamped-reee-diculous/>

or change under T_s' orders—also received pushback, told not to pursue an outside Bible study or social time or not to volunteer with a local coffee shop or summer camp. Students in the university town were discouraged from returning home to their families over the summer—it was seen as a sign that they weren't really committed to the life of the church.”⁸⁶

We don't have to be intimidated by the demands of wolf-like “shepherds” and we can continue to serve Christ as our true Covering. We have the weapons to bring victory through Christ who has promised to always give us the victory.⁸⁷

⁸⁶<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/february/act-s-29-ceo-steve-timmis-removed-spiritual-abuse-tch.html>

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:57

Further Reading

Charismatic Leaders Concede They Went Too Far;

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-03-24-ca-667-story.html>

Divide and conquer: "Cell Churches" and hijacks;

<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2006/10/6/254355/->

The End Of The Discipleship Era; Jamie Buckingham;

<https://jamiebuckinghamministries.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Jan.Feb-1990-The-End-of-the-Discipleship-Era.pdf>

The Shepherding Movement: A Summary, Jacob Young;

<https://jacobyoun84.medium.com/the-shepherding-movement-a-summary-5883c3d27e9f>

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<http://thewartburgwatch.com/2009/04/09/the-shepherding-movement-%E2%80%93-reformed-revamped-reee-diculous/>

Whacking the Wolves; Juan Sanchez;

<https://www.9marks.org/article/whacking-the-wolves/>

Why The Shepherding Movement Failed;

<http://ubfriends.org/priestlynation/why-the-shepherding-movement-failed/index.html>

Testimony



I have been involved in different church situations both Charismatic and Evangelical, since my conversion to Christ in 1966. Up until I retired in 2017, I was a Victim Adviser with the New Zealand Ministry of Justice. That was after 19 years as a school teacher in both secondary and primary schools.

Before my move to Christchurch New Zealand at the end of 2019, I was an elder, worship leader and preacher at a suburban Presbyterian church for 23 years. While in the role of Session Clerk, and the church was without a minister for several years, I effectively pastored the church.

My style of leadership is definitely non-authoritarian. In fact, I tended to lead from so far behind, that people hardly knew I was there! This was because I encouraged others to be involved as fully as possible in the ministry of the church. I was honoured to have three mature and experienced men supporting me, and advising me where necessary.

Between 1970 and 1978, I was part of a Charismatic church in Palmerston North New Zealand, which was heavily influenced by the Shepherding Movement. I saw first-hand, and actually experienced the negative effects of the corruptions of the Movement caused by one or two leaders of that church who used the Movement to exercise power and control through their “authority” over members.

I never supported the Movement, and refused to accept the authority of those particular leaders, and suffered the consequences of being left out

of having any real ministry involvement in that church, and at one time I was told that I was separating myself from the Body of Christ!

As a result of the increasing conflicts I was having, I decided to leave that church and quit the Charismatic Movement altogether after 12 years of continuous involvement in it.

I was pleasantly surprised that when I joined a local Anglican church, that the Shepherding Movement was unknown, and the church leaders had a non-authoritarian approach to ministry. When I moved cities, I joined a Baptist church and was welcomed as a full member without any intrusion into my personal and family life as had happened when I was my previous Charismatic church.

When, as part of my teaching career, I ended up in Auckland, New Zealand, I joined a suburban Presbyterian church and was immediately put to work in the choir and Sunday School. Within a year I was appointed on the Board of Managers, and a year later, ordained as an Elder of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. I also took on the role of Church Treasurer.

When the Session Clerk (senior elder) decided to have a break from the role, I was given the role, which I held for a number of years, working with the then minister, and leading the church when she resigned. I ended up serving the church in those roles for 23 years and left to relocate to Christchurch.

I joined a very small Union (Presbyterian/Methodist) church In New Brighton, Christchurch, and was quickly made part of the Management Committee, and invited to lead worship and preach approximately every six weeks.

In every Evangelical church I have associated with I have found a solid core of genuine believers who love the Lord. My present church functions “above its weight” in the community around it, and it has become as much a spiritual home for me as any of the other churches I have joined.

I am a Christian author, having written a number of teaching and devotional books. I wrote this one in response to information that the Shepherding Movement and Covering doctrine is still very much alive in some New Zealand Charismatic churches.