

Practical Poimnology

Introduction

Ecclesiology is the division of Systematic Theology which centers on the Church. It is a vast study with many particular subdivisions. The Church as the Body of Christ, for example, could be titled Somatology. The Church as the Bride of Christ could be titled Nymphology. Lewis Sperry Chafer listed seven figures which set forth the relation which Christ sustains to the Church¹, and we could title an -ology for each one and be very blessed in such studies.

This study will focus on the figure of shepherd and sheep. The Old Testament uses a rich shepherding vocabulary to refer to shepherds, shepherding, and flocks of sheep. The New Testament continues these rich expressions but primarily applies them metaphorically to a Church context. Various passages reference either the Universal Church or particular local churches or both.

Positional Poimnology emphasizes the Universal Church and centers on Jesus Christ as the Good (Jn. 10:11,14), Great (Heb. 13:20), and Chief (1st Pet. 5:4) Shepherd. Practical Poimnology emphasizes the local church as a specific localized flock of God and centers on the human shepherds to whose charge Jesus Christ has allotted every one of His sheep (1st Pet. 5:1-4).

This study is vital and should be of foremost importance to pulpit committees everywhere. When a local church loses their pastor it often falls to an ad hoc committee of Christians with no clue about what to do. A business approach frequently launches as if somehow a new CEO is being hired. Wrong, wrong, wrong, a thousand times wrong! These are sheep without a shepherd and what they should be doing is listening for the voice of their shepherd (Jn. 10:3,4,16). For a season they are without a human shepherd, but they are never without the Good, Great and Chief Shepherd. Jesus Christ is eternally Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18) and walks in the midst of every local church (Rev. 1:12,13). Jesus knows what He's doing. When Jesus allots a specific localized flock to a new human shepherd, those sheep will hear that voice. Simple. Practical. Hire that guy. Throw out the business model and embrace Practical Poimnology.

Terminology

Poimnology comes from various words found in the Greek New Testament and Septuagint Greek Old Testament related to shepherds and shepherding. It's a significant study, ranging from Genesis to Revelation. I like to tell pastoral students that the first martyr in world history was a shepherd (Gen. 4) and then let that sink in when they recall the Cain and Abel narrative.

If the Lord has called a man to shepherding ministry that man better be fully oriented to the violent nature of that ministry. David didn't face Goliath as a military combat veteran. He faced Goliath as a seasoned shepherd (1st Sam. 17:33-40).

¹ Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993, Vol. 4, pp.27-28. Also Vol. 7, p.60.

▼ ROOT NASB95		
✓	ποιμην	<i>poimēn</i> shepherd
●	ποιμήν	<i>poimēn</i> shepherds
○	ποιμαίνω	<i>poimainō</i> shepherds
○	ποίμνη	<i>poimnē</i> flock
○	ποίμνιον	<i>poimnion</i> flock
○	ἀρχιποίμην	<i>archipoimēn</i> chief shepherd

Poimēn is the noun for shepherd, used literally and figuratively. A compound, Archipoimēn, occurs one time specifying Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd (or Arch-Shepherd). *Poimainō* is the verb for shepherding activity e.g. feeding, watering, leading, resting, binding, tending, etc. As with the noun, the verb is used in literal settings and figurative settings. *Poimnē* and *poimnion* are collective nouns for flock (singular) or flocks (plural). Interestingly, an individual sheep is a *probaton*, from an entirely separate etymological root. Poimnology then does not highlight the sheep. It highlights the shepherding of the flock.

Larger Picture

Practical Poimnology will be focused primarily on local churches and how they identify their human shepherd, how to appreciate their human shepherd, and how to trust in the Good Shepherd if their human shepherd fails them or abandons them.

This narrow view will benefited from a brief synopsis of the broader view from which it is drawn. Several general principles for literal shepherding are applicable to figurative shepherding. That's the nature of a metaphor after all, and why God chose to employ it in this way.

It must also be recognized that the shepherding metaphor was employed for Israel in the Old Testament long before it was employed for the Church in the New Testament. Prophets, priests, and kings were all designated with shepherding responsibilities. When the Shepherds of Israel were unfaithful, the Lord stepped in to manifest His faithful shepherding. He also dealt severely with the faithless shepherds. The scope of such OT figurative shepherding tended to be national—the covenant nation of Israel—yet “The Lord is my shepherd” (Ps. 23) in a very precious way brings the scope down to the individual.

Background reading for this study should highlight the following passages of Scripture: Genesis 4 the first shepherd was the first martyr. Gen. 33 the tenderness and patience required of a shepherd. Gen. 46:34 the disdain for shepherding exhibited by the Egyptians.

David's shepherding background, which suited him to face Goliath (1st Sam. 17) and also equipped him to be king over Israel (2nd Sam. 5:2). Such experiences made David the perfect human instrument for the Holy Spirit to compose Psalm 23—mandatory reading for any shepherd study.

Ezekiel 34 and Zechariah 11 & 13 are significant shepherding passages within the OT Prophets. No Church Age Pastor-Teacher should stand for ordination until he digests and preaches these chapters.

John 10 is the great I AM message of Jesus Christ. I AM the Good Shepherd. This text, along with 1st Peter 5 form core elements of Practical Poimnology. To introduce those core texts however, we will start with Revelation 1-3.

Head of the Church Means Something

Revelation 1-3

While it is common to develop an Ecclesiological study from the Pastoral Epistles, or other NT epistles or even the Church's inauguration in Acts, this study will begin with the New Testament's closing Book: Revelation. The vision of the seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1) and the messages to those seven local churches (Rev. 2&3) are invaluable to Ecclesiological studies and particularly to this Poimnology study.

One significant issue with the Pastoral Epistles and other areas of the NT is that they address pastors and local churches from the perspective of the Apostolic Age. The Apostle Paul is constantly moving pastors around from place to place and directing matters across multiple local churches. That's perfectly fine and Paul is free to do such things as an Apostle of the Church. In so doing, however, some questions are left open to consideration. What should pastors and churches be doing apart from living Apostolic authority? What would the Pastoral Epistles look like if they were written in the post-Apostolic age of the Church Dispensation?

There's no way to answer such questions because by necessity the Greek canon was written and added to the Hebrew canon during the Apostolic age. The closest content that can approximate this ideal of a post-Apostolic Ecclesiology comes in Revelation 1-3. The last living Apostle is writing to the last seven Apostolic lampstands and conveying Ecclesiological and Poimnological content to those local churches.

With the death of the last living Apostle, pastors and churches began to operate apart from living Apostolic authority and entirely under written Apostolic authority. Without living Apostles to move pastors and flocks around, directing matters across multiple local churches, providing guidance for church tradition and practice, whatever could pastors and churches depend on other than the written Apostolic authority of the New Testament?

Ah, not so fast! All the other Apostles may have crossed into glory and ceased their involvement in earthly local church matters, but Jesus Christ remains active. The Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Heb. 3:1) has crossed into glory and is seated at God the Father's right hand, but He has DEFINITELY NOT ceased His involvement in earthly local church matters. This is where Rev. 1-3 becomes crucial.

While Sola Scriptura rings true, the Bible is our sole earthly authority for faith and practice, the fact remains that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church and as per Rev. 1-3 Jesus Christ is actively involved in every golden lampstand. Each lampstand has one star/angel and that star/angel is held in the right hand of Jesus Christ. Most pastors and churches today are completely oblivious to Jesus' active hands-on involvement in their specific local church. Sadly, many congregations would prefer Jesus leave them alone so they can do what they want to do in His name. Such pastors prefer the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18) to be an absentee Lord and hands-off so that as heads of local churches they can do whatever they want to do. Rev. 1-3 destroys that sad view.

Perhaps the misconception arises because Jesus Christ awaits the Father's command to bodily return, conquer, and reign. He is seated at the Father's right hand and will remain so until the Father fashions His footstool (Ps. 110:1). Rev. 1-3 however presents a clear picture that despite Jesus not returning to earth bodily, He is very active in earthly local-church matters. He remains seated (Eph. 1:20; Heb. 8:1), yet He ministers (Heb. 8:2) and He walks (Rev. 2:1).

Sola Scriptura does not prevent Christians from being led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18) who inspired the Bible and illumines it to us for our guidance. Sola Scriptura likewise does not prevent pastors and churches from being led by Jesus Christ. The following material will make this clear.

Terminology and Usage

Practical Poimnology focuses on human shepherds (pastors) and their flocks (congregations). In detailing this information additional terminology will be employed which gives rise to confusion based on different usages throughout Church history. Terms such as elder and overseer are often conflated or used interchangeably. The Greek words behind these terms led to the Presbyterian and Episcopalian modes of church governance.

Practical Poimnology will employ terminology such as elder, overseer, pastor-teacher not interchangeably but rather interrelatedly. Clearly they are interrelated while not being purely synonymous.

Titus 1:5&7 is the easiest place to see elders (v.5) appointed as overseers (v.7). Another place is Acts 20:17&28. That's a broader span of verses yet maintains the same context where the elders (v.17) are made overseers in order to shepherd (v.28). A third passage, 1st Pet. 5:1-2, addresses elders (v.1) and commands them to shepherd the flock, exercising oversight (v.2). This third passage will be expanded shortly.

Keeping terms distinct and simple, it is helpful to classify these interrelated terms as one of maturity-status, one of office, and one of spiritual gift. Pastor-Teacher (Eph. 4:12) is one of twenty Church Age spiritual gifts, one of eleven to continue beyond the Apostolic Age.

Overseer (1st Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7) is one of two local church offices (the other being Deacon). Unlike gifts, which are given by grace at the moment of salvation, offices have qualifications and disqualifications. They can be aspired to and fallen from. Quite a distinction from grace gifts. Deacons may be men or women, but the NT always refers to the Overseer in the masculine gender. The feminine form of the noun is used for the office (1st Tim. 3:2) and never references a woman Overseer, as such a thing is not permitted (1st Cor. 14:34,35; 1st Tim. 2:12).

Elder is a maturity-status. The New Testament addresses members of the Church as a spectrum of spiritual growth (1st Tim. 5:1-2; Tit. 2:2,3; Heb. 5:13-14; 1st Jn. 2:12-14). Pressing on to maturity should be every believer's aim (Heb. 6:1), no matter their spiritual giftedness and no matter their service in or out of the two church offices.

The offices of Overseer and Deacon have character trait qualifications quite harmonious with character exhibited by mature believers. Hence it is understandable that Elders would be among the prime candidates to appoint to those offices. 1st Tim. 5:17 indicates that some elders rule but some elders don't. They may serve in an office for a time and step out of office for a time, that doesn't affect their maturity status and certainly does not forfeit their spiritual gift.

While Practical Poimnology focuses on the shepherd, it must be observed that nowhere in the Office of Overseer qualifications is any particular spiritual-gift stipulated. A believer of any giftedness should grow to the maturity-status of Elder, and may be appointed to the office of Deacon or the office of Overseer.

Every believer should evangelize, with or without that spiritual gift. Every believer should practice grace giving, with or without that spiritual gift. Repeat this concept for every spiritual gift and don't omit the spiritual gift of Pastor-Teacher! Every believer should shepherd in the realms of ministry they have been assigned, with or without that spiritual gift.

Having said all that, it remains evident that the office of Overseer is expected to shepherd, so men with the gift of Pastor-Teacher will be the best suited and divinely empowered to fulfill the ministry that office requires. It is not unheard of for a gifted Evangelist to pastor a church. A gifted Leader or Administrator or any spiritual gift could exercise that office if so appointed, but it is the gifted Pastor-Teacher who is ideally equipped for this office.

Seven Angels

Not many church members would call their pastor an angel but Rev. 1-3 does.² He is a mortal human messenger but he delivers heavenly messages no less so than the immortal spirit-realm messengers. In fact, those spirit-realm messengers long to look into the doctrine that human angels teach! (1st Pet. 1:2).

Each of the seven churches from Rev. 1-3 likely had several elders (Acts 20:17) among which many of them served in the office of overseer (Acts 20:28; 1st Tim. 3:1). When Rev. 1-3 is examined for Ecclesiological and Poimnological elements a number of clear inferences can be drawn. In the post-Apostolic age how will the chain of command be designated? Without a living Apostle to oversee the overseers how will they oversee themselves?

Rev. 1-3 provides the guidance. Regardless of how many elder/overseers any local church may have, one elder/overseer per local church is taken into the right hand of Jesus Christ as He walks in the midst of the local churches. That right-hand messenger is repeatedly addressed as the one and only angel for each and every local church. This gets reinforced over and over again through all seven of the Rev. 1-3 messages. Some of these angels had serious sin struggles. If they were spirit-beings rather than human beings then they must have been fallen angels rather than elect angels, that's for sure!

In any event, read these seven messages in Rev. 1-3. They are not messages to the local churches, they are messages to the angels of the local churches. The head of the Church is somewhat pleased with most of them, but quite displeased with nearly all of them. His Headship is readily seen in His corrective rebukes. After reading these verses, consider them as a corollary to Ezek. 34. Woe! to the faithless shepherds of Israel and Repent! to the angels of the lampstands or else they will be removed from their positions of trust.

² There are other interpretations for the star/angel interpretation of Rev. 1-3. Any reader who holds such interpretations is still encouraged to digest this section anyway and press on to the later sections and conclusion. The full appreciation for Practical Poimnology will be somewhat lessened but the overall principles will still hold from 1st Pet. 5 and John 10. Our friendly disagreement on the stars/angels does not change the lampstand interpretation and the reality of Jesus Christ's hands-on involvement in earthly local-church matters.

Consider a hermeneutically theologically expanded paraphrase of Rev. 2:1. “To the Elder Overseer Pastor-Teacher Angel of Ephesus Bible Church write: The Hands-On Head of the Church Apostle and High Priest Lord Jesus Christ, the One who maintains active involvement in every earthly local church communicates the following.”

Consider a similarly grounded synopsis for Rev. 2:2-5. “I am fully aware of everything you’ve done in ministry, every conflict you’ve engaged in, and every victory you’ve achieved. I’ve seen all that because I have been right here the whole time watching and leading you through all that. At this time however I must point out that your motivation has changed and your present deeds are no longer driven by the first love you formerly expressed. Repent! Return to your first love and first deeds or else I will be coming to you so that hands-on will become even more hands-on and you will be fired from your lampstand duties.”

That synopsis may be over-simplistic but the clear understanding is that Jesus Christ is not disengaged from how His local churches are functioning. It is also clear that Jesus promises eternal rewards in these messages in a way that might find a corollary in 1st Pet. 5 when the Chief Shepherd rewards His allotted charge keepers. That passage will be developed in the next section.

The Pastor of Smyrna Bible Church is next. He receives no rebuke but is about to go through a ferocious time of suffering. He will suffer (singular verb) as he shepherds some of his flock through testing (plural verb) and tribulation (again plural). Jesus maintains hands-on involvement even through this pastor’s martyrdom.

The point has now been made twice. Indeed it is made seven times over. The Head of the Church is not disengaged. He is very engaged, hands-on, involved in the ups and downs of local church ministry, and focused on the accountable leadership of local church ministry. When something needs to be fixed, Jesus doesn’t go to a presbytery or elder committee. He goes to the right-hand man and directs the remedial action. Should the right-hand man not be responsive to Jesus’ correction, he is subject to being fired. Fired by Head of the Church Jesus Christ—not fired by a malcontent human committee. All of this is a powerful comfort when the ups and downs of local church ministry involve losing their pastor and forming a pulpit committee to find another.

Big idea takeaway from Rev. 1-3: the right-hand messenger responsible for each local church is directly answerable to the hands-on Head of the Church.

1st Peter 5:1-5

First Peter chapter Five is quite noteworthy for its own sake but all the more poignant when we recall Jesus’ message to Peter in the famous “Do you love me?” chapter of John’s Gospel. Peter was actually grieved (Jn. 21:17) to have this conversation but the threefold shepherding admonishment evidently had an impact. “Tend My lambs,” “Shepherd My sheep,” and “Tend My sheep” (Jn. 21:15-17) appears to have been processed by Peter for some thirty years, and quite apart from the *agapaō* and *phileō* considerations from John 21, the shepherding imperative is what Peter would express in his first epistle.

All three interrelated local church leadership terms are found in 1st Pet. 5:1-2. The maturity-status terminology of *presbuteros* elder is used in verse one while the office function of *episkopos* overseer is seen in verse two. Between these expressions is the shepherding imperative of *poimainō*. Indeed,

shepherding is not only central between the other two expressions, but shepherding is repeatedly stressed throughout the paragraph with such references as “flock,” “flock,” and “Chief Shepherd.”

Not only is John 21 echoed here, but John 10 as well. Jesus stressed a contrast between the hired hand and the shepherd (Jn. 10:12-13). Peter puts it this way: “not for sordid gain, but with eagerness” (1st Pet. 5:2). Practical Poimnology is not a pecuniary proposition.

Having learned from Paul’s writings also, genuine service to the Lord cannot be grudgingly or under compulsion for the Lord loves the cheerful giver (2nd Cor. 9:7). Peter puts it this way for elder/overseer/pastor-teachers: “not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God” (1st Pet. 5:2). The principle of grace-giving that is true for every believer is particularly vital for those whose giftedness is a blessing of the Lord to particular congregations (Eph. 4:12).

The most striking statement in 1st Pet. 5 is verse three. “Nor yet as lording over those allotted to your charge.” It goes well with the expression in verse two: “shepherd the flock of God among you.” Jesus has sheep and flocks all over the world, but the primary focus every pastor must have is the particular local church to which he has been gifted and the sheep to which he has been assigned.

The right-hand messenger to Ephesus was responsible for that flock and that flock only. He wasn’t expected to deal with Smyrna, Thyatira, etc. Seven stars, seven lampstands, each star held in the right hand of Jesus Christ.

These concepts are expressed again and again in the New Testament. “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction” (1st Thess. 5:12). “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account” (Heb. 13:17). Yes, leadership has authority over the flock but more emphatically—leadership has accountability personally to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any believer who has moved to a new geographical location or who finds themselves “church shopping” for whatever reason ought to read 1st Pet. 5:3 over and over and pray hard. There are not broad criteria to evaluate. There is one criterion and it is summarized by “those allotted to your charge” (1st Pet. 5:3). Each sheep can boil it down to that simple issue. The sheep doesn’t allot himself and the shepherd doesn’t allot them. Clearly, the Allotter is the Chief Shepherd who holds His under-shepherds accountable (1st Pet. 5:2-3) and rewards them at His appearing (1st Pet. 5:4). So, a believer striving to discern the will of God for what local church they belong to has a very simple solution: determine to which shepherd they have been allotted and join that church. It’s not necessary to weigh and balance the music program, singles ministry, commuting distance, or any other idiotic thing. The Bible really makes it simple!

Pulpit committees as well, the KISS principle applies. Keep it simple, stupid! It’s not necessary to weigh and balance various candidates in terms of their accredited or unaccredited degrees, the prestige of their seminaries, or any other such (dare I say, idiotic?) thing. Is Jesus Christ the hands-on Head of the Church or is He not? When Jesus lets go of one star, would it not make sense that He knows which star to take hold of next? Does the pulpit committee expect Him to take such a star into His right hand based upon their selection? Shouldn’t it be the other way around? The pulpit committee, actually the entire flock, ought to accept the right-hand messenger Jesus allots (1st Pet. 5:3), puts in charge (1st Thess. 5:12), and holds accountable (Heb. 13:17).

Does a local church really want to emulate the Saul pattern and get a king for themselves? Wouldn't a David pattern be better? Go for the man God selects (1st Sam. 13:14; 15:28; 16:1).

Matt. 16:18-19

The Church is a heavenly people with an earthly field of service. Our attention must be on the things above even while we function here on earth (Col. 3:1-4). This principle is true individually and corporately. Notice in Matthew 16 how the binding and loosing operations are primarily heavenly activities with earthly reflections.

Here again is a message from Jesus to Peter. Whatever you bind on earth (aorist active) shall have already been bound in heaven (perfect passive). Whatever you loose on earth (aorist active) shall have already been loosed in heaven (perfect passive) (Matt. 16:19). It's clear that in the binding and loosing operations, Jesus is building His church in a hands-on way from heaven while delegated key holders reflect His will on earth. The heavenly action always precedes the earthly reflection in this beautiful design!

Let's say a Pastor-Teacher departs from a local church. He moves to a different church, or he retires, or the deacons fired him or whatever else. The star has been loosed from the lampstand. That didn't surprise Jesus. The Head of the Church has already loosed in heaven before any pastor was cut loose here on earth. When the next Pastor is selected for that congregation, he won't be bound on earth first and then subsequently bound in heaven. Pulpit committees need to quit flipping the script upside down!

When a congregation is given a candidate to consider, hopefully the pulpit committee isn't staging things like a beauty pageant or a popularity contest. It's not an issue of who is liked or not liked. The true question is what has been bound in heaven? Let's bind that on earth in obedience to the Head of the Church. Jesus is walking in the midst of this lampstand, let us identify the star He is already holding in His right hand. That's the new Pastor our pulpit committee needs to identify.

So, how is this done? Practically, how is this done?

John 10

John chapter ten provides very simple yet profound truths as to shepherding in general, and Practical Poimnology in particular. Jesus begins with a figurative discourse (Jn. 10:1-5) followed by I AM the Door (Jn. 10:7-10) and I AM the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11-18) messages. Jesus also has a follow-up message in this chapter which employs the shepherding language and stresses the eternal security of believers (Jn. 10:26-30).

The figurative discourse sets the table for everything that follows. The setting is a sheepfold. Featured characters include a thief and a robber, a shepherd, a doorkeeper, and a stranger. From the very beginning, Jesus' message declares the obvious. Anybody not coming through the door, anybody avoiding the doorkeeper, anybody climbing and sneaking in some other way, is not a good guy. He's not there for good reasons. Simple, yet profound.

Pulpit committees take note. Prior to the appropriate shepherd arriving there may be any number of others interested in the sheep. They're not good guys. They're not coming for good reasons. Sheep without shepherds are subject to predation (Ezek. 34:5,8). Pulpit committees could consider themselves

as the doorkeeper. Who are you going to open the door for? Who would you not open the door for, and are you aware of it when those thieves and robbers sneak in some other way?

Back to John 10. The doorkeeper opens the door for identified shepherds, one at a time (Jn. 10:2,3). Multiple flocks could be kept at night in the same sheepfold. As each shepherd arrives in the morning, his sheep will hear his voice and follow him. Notice how the shepherd knows his own sheep by name (Jn. 10:3). His own sheep know his voice and follow him (Jn. 10:4), but they won't follow a stranger's voice i.e. another shepherd not theirs (Jn. 10:5). That's actually a significant point. The stranger is not a thief or a robber, he is one for whom the doorkeeper has opened the door and one who calls out in full observation of the doorkeeper.

This practice by the way continues in modern times among the Bedouins of Israel. Gerald Borchert writes of his personal observations to such phenomena in his commentary on John 1-11.³

The shepherd knows his own and calls them by name. The sheep know his voice and do not know the voice of strangers. This principle is repeated in the Good Shepherd message (Jn. 10:14). In this message another important contrast is drawn, discriminating between shepherds and hired hands. That is a vital importance! Wolves must be dealt with, and the hired hand is inadequate to the task. Pulpit committees take note! You will of course pay your new pastor what you can, and it is Biblical to do so (Lk. 10:7; 1st Cor. 9:6-14; 1st Tim. 5:17,18). Having said that, money should never be the issue. If he's obedient to the will of Jesus Christ, if he's held in the right hand of Jesus Christ, if he's bound in heaven, a faithful shepherd will lead the flock without any pay whatsoever. He may be bi-vocational for years and years.

The shepherd knows his own and calls them by name. The sheep know his voice and do not know the voice of strangers. This relates very well to 1st Peter 5. The Church Universal is obviously the flock of God (1st Pet. 5:2) but the particular subset of the Church Universal is the flock of God "among you," that is the local church that has been allotted to a certain shepherd's charge (1st Pet. 5:3).

Conclusion

Col. 3:1-2 does not have an exemption when pulpit committees are formed to initiate a pastor search. "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

The binding and loosing principle (Mt. 16:19; 18:18) is plain but our apprehension of such binding and loosing may take time to become plain. What we are to bind and/or loose on earth are those things that have already been bound and/or loosed in heaven. So how do we know what Jesus has bound or loosed? What is our window into the heavenly realm? Well, as per Col. 3:1 we "seek" and this is a thinking discipline (Col. 3:1) via prayer. The ask/seek/knock Church operations are prayer operations (Mt. 7:7-11).

³ Borchert, Gerald L. *John 1-11*. Vol. 25A. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996. A similar testimony was offered by J. Vernon McGee: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. Electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997.

These concepts for a congregation to identify their new shepherd are equally valid for “identifying” their former shepherd. They may not immediately realize he is their former shepherd and may still assume he remains their shepherd, but something seems wrong. His voice is different—not what it used to be.

Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church opens doors and closes doors. He binds and He looses. He holds stars in His right hand and He lets them go. A prayerful congregation, led by mature elders and deacons, may come to realize that Jesus Christ still walks in the midst of their lampstand but He no longer holds the same star in His right hand that He previously held. Re-read Rev. 1-3 and take note how frequently Jesus threatens to fire the messengers who do not repent. Lampstands are sometimes removed.

In such cases it is appropriate for those congregations to fire their pastor. Practical Poimnology equips us to appropriately hire and/or fire a pastor when the appointed time comes for that to happen. What has already been loosed in heaven ought to be loosed on earth. It’s not a rebellion on the part of a congregation against their pastor. It’s obedience to the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd to accept His wisdom in re-allotting them to a new earthly shepherd. Trying to keep a door open when Jesus Christ has shut it is vain!

So how long does it take to apprehend the will of God? How long must we ask/seek/knock? That’s God’s business. Our imperative is to pray without ceasing (1st Thess. 5:17) and to keep asking until He answers (Lk. 18:1-8). The time it takes for us to apprehend God’s will is time well spent. We walk by faith and not by sight (2nd Cor. 5:7). We wait upon the Lord for His provision in the wisdom of His perfect timing (Ps. 130:5,6).

Jesus is not deceptive or secretive as He relates to His disciples. A slave may not know what his master is doing, but Jesus calls us friends and makes known to us what His Father has for Him to do (Jn. 15:15).

Every pulpit committee, indeed every congregation in need of a shepherd should be asking/seeking/knocking. Asking to apprehend what has been bound in heaven so we can volitionally and cooperatively bind the same on earth. Ask and it will be given. Seeking to hear the voice of their shepherd. Seek and ye shall find. Knocking for the door to be opened whereby their new shepherd can lead them forth to good pasture. This is a procedure that is commanded (Mt. 7:7) with results that are guaranteed (Mt. 7:8).