

# The Work of Love

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## Introduction

In this lesson, let us consider the commands Christ gave to Simon Peter: “Tend My Lambs” and “Shepherd My Sheep” (John 21:15-17). Genuine love must be active (1 Thess. 1:2-10; Heb. 6:9-12).

*John 21:15-17 ... 15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “**Tend My lambs.**” 16 He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “**Shepherd My sheep.**” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “**Tend My sheep.**” (NASB95)*

## Tend My Lambs

The Greek verb *boskō*, translated “*tend My lambs,*” occurring 9x in the NT, is used actively of herders who tend to the needs of animals, and passively, of livestock that is tended.

- Thomas defines βόσκω [*boskō*] as “to feed” [1006].
- BDAG say it means “(1) to tend to the needs of animals, herd, tend, of herders; (2) to feed on herbage, graze, feed, used passively, of livestock.”
- This word occurs 9x in the NT (Matt. 8:30, 33; Mark 5:11, 14; Luke 8:32, 34; 15:15; John 21:15, 17).

Coming into the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus healed the demon-possessed man. He allowed the demons to enter a herd of swine, which rushed down a steep bank and perished in the waters. This word occurs in all three synoptic accounts, describing both the herd of swine, and their herdsmen (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39). After the prodigal son went into a distant country and squandered his estate in loose living, he hired himself out to a local citizen, and was sent into the fields to feed swine (Luke 15:11-24). Indeed, the way of transgressors is hard (Prov. 13:15; Jer. 2:19; Rom. 6:21). Restoring Simon Peter to his apostleship, Jesus Christ commanded him to “Tend My lambs” (John 21:15, 17).

## **Shepherd My Sheep**

The Greek verb *poimainō*, translated “*shepherd* My sheep,” occurring 11x in the NT, means to act as a shepherd of sheep, or figuratively, to watch out for other people, to lead, guide, or rule, to protect, care for, or nurture.

- Thomas defines ποιμαίνω [*poimainō*] as from *poimēn* [a shepherd], meaning “to act as a shepherd” [4165].
- BDAG say it means “(1) to serve as tender of sheep, herd, tend, (lead to) pasture; (2) to watch out for other people, to shepherd, of activity that protects, rules, governs, fosters, fig. ext. of 1: (a) in the sense of lead, guide, or rule... (b) protect, care for, nurture.”
- This word occurs 11x in the NT (Matt. 2:6; Luke 17:7; John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 9:7; 1 Pet. 5:2; Jude 12; Rev. 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15).

The work of shepherding, well known in Bible times, communicates various spiritual truths (Luke 17:7-10; 1 Cor. 9:3-7). Jesus Christ shepherds His people (Matt. 2:1-6; cf. Mic. 5:2-4; Rev. 7:16-17; 12:5-6; 19:11-16). Elders shepherd the local congregations of which they are members (Acts 20:25-35; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Simon Peter performed this work, both as an apostle and as an elder (John 21:16; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Failing utterly in this regard, false teachers care only for themselves (Jude 8-13). In heaven, victorious saints share in the rule and reign of Jesus Christ (Rev. 2:26-28; cf. Psalms 2:7-9; Matt. 19:27-28; 2 Tim. 2:11-13)

## **Conclusion**

“Tend My Lambs” and “Shepherd My Sheep” are serious responsibilities, involving hard work, having application to the apostolic office, the oversight of elders, the work of parents, teachers, etc. We demonstrate our love for Christ by keeping his commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:3-5; 5:3). We demonstrate our love for Christ by serving one another (John 21:15-17).