

Throughout the history of our land, we have endured many rulers, encompassing many greater and lesser empires. Under the Roman authority, there were various levels of these rulers from governors to Caesars. They all expected us to obey them and punished those very severely who did not. They were not leaders, with followers who chose their path, but people who whose strategy was to control others by force and demanded of them that they follow.

From the beginning of time since man's creation, God has wanted us to **follow** Him as His people. We choose who we follow, and should follow God with all of our hearts¹. We have God, and through Him the Christ, as shepherds² which take care of us. In this image we follow the shepherd, even when sometimes we have to be "herded" into the right direction. The authority of the shepherd is benevolent – it is used for our own good.

Consider the way that Jesus spoke of the Pharisees, that they thought themselves to be leaders, but in actuality were only impeding others from being God's people. They did not really have a following, as they were "driving" people through intimidation and the threat of being cast out of the synagogue (outside the camp; outer darkness?). This is why the Pharisees wanted to arrest Him (and eventually kill Him when they could not get in control). So there are those who *lead*, and those who *impede* – at opposite ends of the path.

Jesus made such a bold statement about how such leaders would impede people from becoming what God wanted them to be:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are."³

He also referred to such impedance as presenting a stumbling block to others. He pronounced woe on anyone who would cause such interference in the path to God⁴. Jesus even chastised Peter and called him an adversary when He began to speak of His upcoming suffering and death⁵.

A true leader has those who follow him – and he inspires people such that they are irresistibly drawn to him. Christ is that type of leader; He was the Good Shepherd⁶, and those who agree with Him and love Him will follow Him⁷. Leadership must be strong, as Christ was, not forcing people, but leading them (as with a very powerful force of attraction). He leads those who have a heart for Goodness – He only impedes those adversaries who resist Him.

1. Deuteronomy 6:5.
2. Psalm 23:1 and Isaiah 40:11 for God as shepherd; John 10 for Christ.
3. Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan [adversary]! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Matthew 23:13,15. Note also that John wrote about Diotrephes because "he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church."

4. Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. Luke 17:1.
5. Matthew 16:21-23.
6. John 10:11.
7. John 10:4.

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