

# *Sheep Stealing*

ETHICS IN THE APOSTOLIC  
PENTECOSTAL CHURCH



PASTOR KEITH JOEL WALKER



# SHEEP-STEALING

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*Written by*  
Pastor Keith Joel Walker

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## Introduction

In the life of a church, the dynamics of community, leadership, and spiritual growth are inextricably linked. One of the most challenging issues faced by pastors and church leaders is the phenomenon of “sheep-stealing”—the act of enticing members from one congregation to another. This booklet explores the ethical considerations surrounding this issue within the Apostolic Pentecostal Church, providing insights for maintaining unity, integrity, and spiritual health in our congregations.

## Understanding Sheep-Stealing

### Definition and Context

Sheep-stealing refers to the practice of drawing members from one church to another, often through unethical means. This can manifest in various ways, from open proselytizing to subtle manipulation. It is essential to recognize that this behavior not only impacts the individuals involved but also has broader spiritual ramifications for the entire church body.

### Biblical Foundations

The Bible provides numerous examples of leadership challenges and community dynamics. The story of

Jesus asking His disciples if they would also leave Him (John 6:66-67) serves as a poignant reminder that true followers are often tested by hardship. Similarly, the allegory of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael illustrates the necessity of letting go of influences that may hinder God's purpose for the church (Genesis 17:18).

### Metaphoric and Poetic Meaning

In the tapestry of faith, the church is often likened to a flock of sheep, with Christ as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). Sheep are creatures of instinct, easily swayed by their surroundings. When one sheep wanders, it can lead others astray, creating a ripple effect that disrupts the entire flock.

Fable of the Lost Sheep: Once, in a lush green meadow, a shepherd tended to his flock with great care. One curious sheep, drawn by the allure of a distant field, wandered away. The shepherd noticed the absence and, with a heavy heart, left the ninety-nine to find the one. This fable teaches us that while each soul is precious, the integrity of the flock must be preserved. The wandering sheep, without the shepherd's guidance, risks not only its own safety but also the unity of the entire flock.

# The Role of Pastoral Leadership

## Spiritual Authority

Pastors are divinely appointed leaders tasked with shepherding their congregations. This role comes with the responsibility to discern the spiritual health of the church and make necessary decisions regarding membership. It is vital for pastors to exercise their spiritual authority with wisdom and compassion, understanding that their choices can significantly impact the congregation's unity and growth.

## Navigating Discontent

Dealing with disgruntled members can be emotionally taxing for pastors. It requires a balance of empathy and discernment, as leaders must address underlying issues while maintaining the morale of the congregation. Pastors are called to engage in open dialogue, seeking to resolve conflicts and restore relationships.

## The Importance of Unity

### Preventing Schisms

Unity is essential for a church to function effectively.

Disunity can lead to schisms, which can be detrimental to the church's mission and witness in the community. The Apostle Paul admonishes us in 1 Corinthians 12:25 that there should be "no schism in the body." Pastors must actively work towards consensus and mutual care within the church.

## Fostering Healthy Relationships

Creating an environment of open communication and accountability is crucial. Pastors should encourage congregants to express their concerns and grievances promptly, fostering a culture of support and understanding. By addressing issues before they escalate, pastors can help prevent conflicts and maintain harmony within the church.

## Contagion of Negative Spirits

### Identifying Negative Influences

Negative attitudes and spirits can be contagious within a congregation. Just as fear can spread among soldiers, so too can discontent among church members. Pastors must be vigilant in identifying and addressing these influences, safeguarding the spiritual health of the congregation.

## Safeguarding the Congregation

To protect the church from detrimental influences, pastors should cultivate a spirit of discernment and prayer. This involves seeking God's guidance in addressing conflicts and making decisions that align with His will for the church.

## Persecution as a Purifying Force

### Historical Context

Throughout church history, persecution has often served as a refining process, removing those who are not genuinely committed. This historical perspective reminds us that adversity can lead to growth and clarity of purpose within the church.

### Contemporary Application

In modern contexts, the absence of persecution may lead to complacency among congregants. Pastors are challenged to cultivate a culture of genuine faith and resilience, encouraging members to remain steadfast in their commitment to Christ and the church.

## Practical Strategies for Pastors

### Encouraging Healthy Departures



When faced with disgruntled members, pastors should allow them to leave with dignity rather than trying to retain them at all costs. This approach preserves peace within the congregation and models a spirit of grace and understanding.

## Financial Considerations

Pastors often face pressure to maintain financial stability for their churches. This reality can complicate decision-making, as leaders must weigh the spiritual health of the congregation against practical needs. It is crucial to prioritize the long-term health of the church over short-term retention.

## The Proper Release

A critical aspect of ethical behavior in the Apostolic Pentecostal Church involves the proper release of members. When a congregant wishes to leave for another church, especially another Apostolic Pentecostal church, it is essential that this transition occurs with the blessing of the pastor.

1. Communication with the Pastor: The departing member should communicate openly with their pastor, ensuring that the decision to leave is made with mutual understanding.

2. Notification of the Previous Church: If a member from another Apostolic Pentecostal church visits, the pastor should inquire whether their previous pastor knows of their attendance. This not only honors the previous church but also maintains the integrity of the Apostolic fellowship.

3. Blessing and Release: A proper release should involve a blessing from the pastor, recognizing the member's journey while ensuring that they leave without any unresolved issues or negative feelings. This blessing serves as a spiritual commissioning, allowing the member to transition with God's favor.

### Boundaries of Communication

It is crucial for pastors of one Apostolic Pentecostal church to maintain ethical boundaries when it comes to the members of another church. A pastor should never contact, call, text, email, or message through social media any member of another Apostolic Pentecostal church. Engaging in such behavior is tantamount to being a "wolf in shepherd's clothing."

- Respecting Boundaries: When a sheep from another church approaches, pastors must not entertain gossip or negative remarks about the previous pastor. If they speak ill of their former shepherd, it is likely they will do the same in your flock.
- Preventing Division: Allowing such behavior can

lead to division and unrest in your own congregation. If a member has previously split from another church, there is a high likelihood they will bring that same spirit of division into your church.

## Conclusion

The issue of sheep-stealing presents significant challenges for pastors and church leaders within the Apostolic Pentecostal Church. By understanding the ethical implications and employing practical strategies, leaders can navigate these complexities while fostering a healthy, unified congregation. The call to shepherd God's people is both a privilege and a responsibility, and with God's guidance, we can maintain the integrity and mission of our churches.

## Reflection Questions

1. How can we as a congregation foster an environment of unity and support?
2. What steps can we take to address conflicts and grievances promptly?
3. How can we discern the influences within our church that may be detrimental to our mission?
4. In what ways can we ensure that our practices around member transitions uphold the ethical standards of our faith?

5. How can we effectively communicate the importance of respecting other churches and their leaders to our congregation?

### Prayer for Guidance and Wisdom

My sermon booklet aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the ethical considerations surrounding sheep-stealing within the Apostolic Pentecostal Church. It emphasizes the importance of pastoral leadership, unity, and the need for a healthy community, equipping church leaders with insights and strategies to navigate these challenges effectively. Through metaphoric and poetic meanings, as well as practical guidelines, it seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the responsibilities inherent in church leadership.