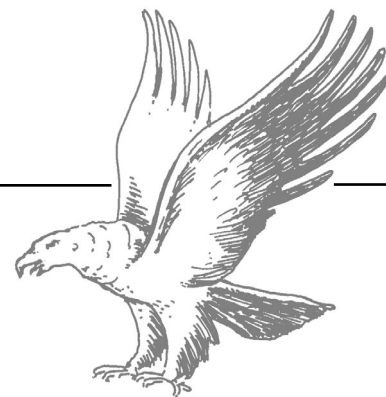


# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



October 31, 2010

## God's Clergy

The modern conception of a distinct class of individuals dedicated to God's service has a Biblical basis — but not in the manner most people think.

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

Most Christian denominations today employ trained professionals to guide their congregations. The titles worn by these professionals may vary, but the basic idea is the same: a special class of spiritual leaders is set apart to God's service, for the purpose of leading God's people. This “clergy” class undergoes intensive training for the role, and is ordained to that honor. Not everyone can be a clergyman.

At first glance, this passage in First Peter seems to address this class of ecclesiastical experts. But a closer study of the wording not only nullifies that concept, it turns it completely upside down.

Notice the phrase “those entrusted to you” in v. 3. In the original Greek, this phrase is a single word (*kleron*). Literally, the word means “that which is

assigned by lot, portion, share” (Arndt & Gingrich), here used in the plural. Most translations render this word as some variation of “those allotted to your charge” (NASV, RSV, ASV). W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of N. T. Words* notes that this Greek word has passed into English as “clergy.” A hint of this usage can be seen in the old King James Version, which attempts to capture the etymology of the word with a more poetic rendering, “God's heritage.”

The use of the word in this context is significant, because it is applied not to the elders (presbyters, pastors) who have the oversight, but to those who are being overseen, “the flock of God” itself. In other words, God's “clergy” is not a subset of trained specialists within the church, but the church in its entirety. *All of God's people are His clergy.*

This concept overthrows the modern idea of a trained clergy class within the church. God sees all His people as a special class of humanity. In fact, Peter said as much earlier in this epistle: “You are a chosen generation, a royal priest-

hood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (2:9). God is glorified, not by an elite cadre of super-spiritual experts, but by ordinary men and women serving Him in their daily lives. That privilege is available to anyone who desires to accept it.

Certainly there are leadership functions within God's church. The “shepherds” whom Peter addresses in this passage have a solemn responsibility, and must meet certain qualifications to take on that role (1 Tim. 3:1-8; Tit. 1:5-9). But they are merely “first among equals,” local leaders who arise from among the people they serve. They have no special connection to God that is not available to the rest of His people.

The knowledge that as a Christian—just a simple child of God—I am one of God's clergy, a special person with a special mission in life, should cause me to see my role in a different light. God has placed on me the honor of displaying His name before the world. I must take that role seriously.

– David King