

22.22

## 1 Timothy 5:17–22—Qualified Elders

“Lycidas” was one of the earliest poems written by John Milton, who would ultimately be famous for *Paradise Lost*. Milton composed the poem in 1637 as a tribute to a friend who had perished at sea. In the first portion of the long work, Milton asks why the powers that be were not more attentive to prevent the tragedy. Saint Peter responds (in lines 108–131) by essentially changing the subject, complaining about all the unworthy shepherds that now lead God’s flock:

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least  
That to the faithful herdman’s art belongs!  
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;  
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs  
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw;  
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,  
But swoll’n with wind, and the rank mist they draw,  
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:  
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw  
Daily devours apace, and nothing said;  
But that two-handed engine at the door  
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

A similar notion of unworthy shepherds (incompetent and/or uncaring religious leaders) may be found in Ezekiel 34:1–19 and in such New Testament texts as John 10:12–13.

The Pastoral Letters aim to prevent such poor leadership by emphasizing the character requirements of those who would be bishops, deacons, or elders in the church and by imploring those with authority not to be too hasty in empowering people (1 Tim. 5:22).