

**Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.** <sup>29</sup> **I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.** <sup>30</sup> **Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.** <sup>31</sup> **So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.**

<sup>32</sup> **“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”** (NIV84)

Theme: The Good Shepherd Calls his Under-Shepherds

1. To Watch over the flock
2. To Share the Gospel

What is the best title for a Pastor? Some people call them preachers, because they preach God’s word from a pulpit. While that is an important aspect of what they do, they do much more. Some people call them Ministers—because they minister or serve the gospel. Sometimes the word Reverend is used because they are to be revered because of their position. Other names have been used as well. So what term is the best? Well it is a matter of opinion. The Holy Spirit often called them Elders or Overseers, such as in our text for today. But here, and in other places, he also calls them, shepherds. This takes us back to the most common term used for those in the public ministry of the gospel—Pastor.

The word Pastor means shepherd. It is a fitting title and analogy for their work. Today we see that Jesus, the Good Shepherd calls his under-shepherds. He calls them to watch over his flock and to share the gospel.

In our Gospel this morning Jesus said, **I am the Good Shepherd.** He is the Good Shepherd and we are his sheep. We know him. And he knows us. And despite knowing our sins, he still laid down his life for us. He willingly died on the cross to save us from our enemies. So Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but in our text he also calls the Elders of Ephesus shepherds. **Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of**

**which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.** The Elders or Overseers of Paul’s day are similar to Pastors today. So Pastors are told to shepherd

It is a fitting title—for Pastor means shepherd. And it describes what a pastor does. He watches over the flock of God. He oversees the spiritual lives of God’s people. He protects them from their spiritual enemies, just like a shepherd protects sheep from their enemies. He care for each one individually. He will go out in search of a lost and straying sheep and rejoice when they are found. The Pastor then, is entrusted to the care of God’s people. And he cares for them, as if they were his own.

And noticed who has placed him there. **The Holy Spirit has made you overseers.** It is God who has called the Pastor to serve him And he does this through the congregation the Pastor is called to serve.

Now, we may tend to look at the doctrine of the call as a somewhat abstract teaching. It is for Pastors, Professors, and other theologians to talk about and argue over. Perhaps you think that it’s too obscure to understand, that it’s over your head a little bit. Or that it really doesn’t apply to your life that often. But it does. Everyday the doctrine of the call applies to you in this: you know that God loves you so much and that he cares about your spiritual lives so much, that he has called others to watch over you. He has specifically chosen individuals to watch and care for you as a shepherd does his own sheep.

Paul was concerned for the Pastors of Ephesus because he knew what would happen. **I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.** This world is not kind to Christians and the one true faith. They attack from all sides. People try use reason to prove that the Bible says is false. They claim that science proves that God did not create the world about 6000 years ago. They call us ignorant, stupid, or gullible. They viciously attack us like a wolf attacking his prey. They try to attack the whole flock. So Pastors are here to help us mark and avoid those who attack our faith. But many of the attacks from the outside world are somewhat easy to avoid. Some are not so easy. Jesus describes false teachers as **wolves in sheep’s clothing.** They often don’t attack out in the open. They first want to appear friendly. Take a look at our first verse for

example. The second half of the verse reads: **Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.** Who paid a price for sinners with his own blood? Obviously it was Jesus—he paid the price of his own blood when he died on the cross. And here it says that it is God who bought the Church with his own blood. Therefore Jesus is God.

But that doesn't sit well with some people. They deny that Jesus is God. They will say he paid for our sins, but he isn't God. So they have a different translation. For instance, the New World Translation—the translation of the Jehovah Witnesses, reads, “shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own [Son].” To be fair, this is a perfectly legitimate translation as far as Greek grammar goes. It could also be understood correctly from a theological standpoint. But it is more telling when you look at what they don't say. They don't want to say that Jesus, who paid for our sins, is God. So they change the normal usage of a word to say something else.

This may seem like a subtle change. But the ramifications of this are tremendous. For if Jesus isn't God, then he isn't our Savior. Because his perfect life couldn't be given to us. And he wouldn't have been able to pay for our sins—and we'd still be on our way to hell. As we read in Psalm 49, **No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him.** This is one example of Satan **masquerading as an angel of light.** And of false teachers being wolves in sheep's clothing.

Again, this is why we have pastors. They watch over us and our spiritual lives. They guard and protect us from our spiritual enemies. They watch over us so that we are not mistakenly lead astray. They oversee our spiritual lives against attacks from the outside. And from those who claim to be inside God's Church. From time to time attacks on the truth do not come from the gospel's enemies. But from those who love the gospel. Perhaps they are mistaken as to what is the truth. Perhaps they are being decisive on purpose. That is why the Pastor is more than a preacher, but an overseer. As Paul told young Timothy the Pastor, **Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.**

The overseer of the Church of God has much work to do. You never know when and from where an attack may come. **So be on your guard!** Paul says to the Pastors of Ephesus.

The world can be a scary place. It is even more scary when you consider all the attacks Christians face. Even more scary when you consider who the overseers are. They are sinners just like you. They will not do everything perfectly. They will not preach and teach everything exactly as they should. How are Pastors supposed to watch over the flock when they themselves are one of the sheep? How are they supposed to oversee everything when they are just as helpless against the devil as the rest of us?

And we take a look at our pastors and begin to doubt. Or we then to look down on them. They aren't that spectacular of people. They are no better than anyone else. Why should they be leading us? Why are they the shepherds over the flock? We don't think their job is all that important. After all, if it was, then certainly God would have placed someone more capable over us. Or we think that they don't do that good of a job. Maybe it is because they don't do what we want them to do, they aren't that exciting to listen to, or interesting to talk to.

And to a certain extent, I can't blame you. I'm not that competent of a person. I'm not that elegant of a speaker. I'm not that exciting to listen to or interesting to talk to. I'm of average intelligence. I do or say things that you may not always agree with. And yet, you don't have to worry. For the ability to do my job doesn't rest on me. It rests on the power of the gospel. I can't defend you against all the enemies that will attack. I myself am powerless against the devil.

But I am not an overseer on my own. The Lord is my Shepherd—I am merely his under-shepherd. I have God and his gospel. As Paul left the Ephesian Elders he told them, **I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.** I can't do this job on my own. But God is with me. He watches over me and protects me. He is the one who gives me the strength and ability to watch over his flock.

And he gives me his Word of grace. I have the gospel at my disposal. That is what makes me competent. That is the only reason why anyone should listen to what I say. It is through the gospel that I am able to watch over the flock of God. It is the gospel in Word and Sacraments. The gospel written down for us in his Word, the gospel

given to us through the waters of baptism and through Christ's body and blood in with and under the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper are the tools I have at my disposal to watch over God's flock.

Notice what God and his gospel do. They **build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.** God's gospel builds up the Church. It is what God uses to bring people to faith and keeps them in the one true faith. Through the gospel in the Word and baptism God brings us to faith. Through the gospel in the Word and the Lord's Supper he keeps us in the one true faith. So it is through the gospel that he builds and sustains his Church. That is why you are all here today. That is why anyone is a believer. Those who are true believers are not believers because of the pastor. It is not because he is clever, or well-spoken. It is through the power of God's gospel.

The same thing that God uses through a pastor to bring someone to faith is the same thing he uses through a pastor to keep someone in the faith. That is why a pastor preaches and teaches God's word. That is why it is important that he preach and teach it in its truth and purity. Its essential to our faith. Without hearing the Word we will forget the gospel. We may begin to doubt God's word and eventually fall away. But it is the gospel that keeps us strong until the end. And those who believe the gospel at their end, will receive an inheritance. And that inheritance is the gift of eternal life in heaven forever.

The term, "Pastor" certainly is a proper term for public ministers of the gospel. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. And because he is good he has called men to serve his flock as his under shepherds—or pastors. He calls them to watch over his flock against their spiritual enemies. An impossible task—but one they do not on their own. For Christ has given them God and his Word to watch over his flock. It is this gospel, shared by his under shepherds, that has brought you to faith and leads you to your inheritance of eternal life. Amen.