

The Shepherd's Protection, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

Let me give you a short list of people whom pastors watch over and protect. First, pastors start by watching themselves. We're sheep. We got to watch over our own souls, got to guard our own hearts for signs of drift. 1 Timothy 4:16, "pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; and persevere in these things, for as you do this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."

Pastors got to watch themselves. Pastors, next, number two, have to watch over individual sheep and make sure individual sheep are not being deceived and being slipping away following prey to the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jesus warns in John 10. John 10 is an awesome passage. I just, I debated on whether or not to just preach that, but I go back to it.

I just have limited time, but Jesus warns in John 10:10, he says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. He doesn't enter into the sheep fold through the sheep gate." That

is he, he avoids the qualification issue, he avoids the calling issue. He avoids the appropriateness of his being there. He hops the fence through some other means and makes himself a shepherd.

And we got a lot of self-appointed shepherds out there, a lot of people being promoted into eldership. They have no business being there. They're not qualified, they're not gifted, they're not trained. They, they have, they have no business being there. Thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. He strikes the weak sheep wandering at the outskirts of the fold, wandering into dangerous briars that that attach themselves to the soul and pull them away.

Just insert a, insert a footnote here, how is it that pastors practice a constant self-watch while they are at the same time also watching over the flock of God? Simple. We follow the priorities of Peter that he gave in Acts 6:4, prayer and ministry of the Word. Prayer and ministry of the Word.

Pastors have to be men like Ezra. Ezra 7:10, "Who had set his heart to study the law of God and to practice it and to teach his statutes and judgments in Israel." You know what Ezra did first, he tended to himself, his own heart. He studied the Word of God so that he would grow and, in, out of his growth, then he turns and teaches the statutes and judgments in Israel.

He teaches what he knows by experience. He teaches what he has practiced for himself. He teaches the comfort of God for people because he's been comforted. He teaches the warnings of God because he's felt the warnings. We're engaged in a spiritual warfare, so those of us called to lead from the front on the battlefield have to know the nature of the battle. We have to recognize the strength and the superiority of enemy forces. We have to see the contrast with our own weakness and vulnerabilities. And we have to look to the God who has all power and all wisdom.

With that battle ready mindset, we put on the full armor of God every single day. And we pray for our fellow soldiers as we help them follow our example and do the same thing. So point one: Pastors looking after themselves, point two: Pastors looking after individual sheep. They're one and the same. Third, pastors watch over the local church. And what I mean by that is not individual people, but the corporate body. We have to watch over, attend to the health and the morale of the whole church.

We build toward a collective discernment together, a corporate maturity. That's Ephesians 4:11 to 16. You can jot that down and read it later. But just as a disease can enter into a flock of sheep and afflict it and cause the sheep to

become sick, sometimes causing a lifelong weakness, disease, even death, so also like a spiritual disease, unhealthy trends, ungodly habits of speech, unrighteous practices, these things destroy a local church and harm it's witness.

And so in the local church, pastors protect the doctrinal purity of the church from false teachers and false teaching. We live in a hyper connected age and so false doctrine is entering into the homes and the hearts of church members all the time without a visit from a visible, physically present false teacher. It's coming through the Internet; so hard for us to deal with, but we take Paul's warnings, warnings from Jude and Peter about the damage that's caused, to by impure doctrine entering the church. And we try to be watchful, helpful.

Pastors also must protect not just the doctrinal purity of the church, but the practical purity of the church from influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Whether members are led astray and enticed by their own lusts, or whether they're disobedient people who are influencing them to stray, wander, experiment, sinful habits, and sinful attitudes, whatever the case. Following after cultural trends, following after what's cool, what's accepted in society, John says, do not

love the world or the things in the world, don't love it, turn away from it. Love the father only.

Pastors protect not just the doctrinal purity of the church, the practical purity of the church, but also the unity of the church, and the harmony of the church, so that the church stands firm in one spirit. Philippians 1:27, "With one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." And he says this in verse 28, Also "in no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you and that too, from God," to protect the unity and the harmony of the church.

And we not only strive together, one mind, one Spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, but we also, we don't worry about those people who are opponents, who oppose, who cast aspersions on the church, those who criticize and ridicule, those who eventually in this age are going to start to persecute. We're not worried about our opponents. That's just a sign of destruction for them. But it's an affirmation of salvation for you who continue to follow in that environment.

We have to guard against divisions in the body. 1 Corinthians 1:10, those who cause division, Titus 3:10, so that no bad influences, no false doctrine, no lovers of iniquity, no

bad actors come and destroy the unity of the harmony of the church for which Christ died to make them one.

Fourth thing the pastors protect is the witness of the universal church. How do we practice? How can we be responsible for the witness of the universal church? That's about doing our part in our local church so our local church doesn't cast a bad witness on the church universal, so that when people look at our church, they say that's what the church of Christ universally should be. And they don't look at our church and say, oh, this is a sin loving, sin tolerating church. This is a culturally affirming church. And that's what the body of Christ universally is.

So we have to, this is about the affirmation, cooperation, participation with cultural movements, maybe even with other churches, sometimes withholding that affirmation of other churches because they've drifted, or perhaps warning about the weakness, decline, falseness of other churches, or on the other hand, affirming them, affirming them. So when pastors don't protect, the ones that they're charged to protect are harmed, caused to stumble, led into sin, whether doctrinally or practically.

This leads us to a third Point number three: How pastors must protect, how pastors must protect. So we think about the duty to protect the flock. Shepherds grow in obedience to and wisdom in following several biblical practices and doing these things, maintaining these habits in our ministry, protecting these several practices of church life.

This is how Christ protects his church. First, pastors protect baptism and membership. Baptism and membership. Scripture says the church of Jesus Christ is comprised of believers who are regenerate, born again, spirit filled, that's it. Those are the occupants of this set we call the church: Regenerate, born again, spirit filled.

The church is a community of those God chose to partake of the new covenant inaugurated in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We're those who have received, according to Ezekiel 36:26, for those of all of, us have received a new heart, new spirit from God, we're possessed by the Holy Spirit of God, verse 27, and that is evidenced in a new walk, that is evidenced in a new way of living, as we obey God's statutes and ordinances, as we have an ever-increasing fruit of the Spirit in our lives, Galatians 5:22.

So when you see people who profess Christ, who don't walk in obedience, live however they want to, when you see people who don't bear the fruit of the Spirit, but actually have the works of the flesh coming out of their hearts, revealed in times of pressure, tension, trial, that's when their hearts erupt. There's a problem with that profession. There's a problem with our profession if that's happening in times of tension, and testing, and trial.

So as pastors, we do our level best to avoid baptizing unbelievers. We, we don't receive unbelievers into church membership, not knowingly anyway. We do our best to protect the process of examining candidates for baptism, applicants for church membership because brutish goats, false sheep, they wreak havoc in a body, as we've already talked about. Our Lord, the vine dresser has various ways of pruning the vine and cutting off these nutrient sucking branches that are fruitless and lifeless.

And that brings us to second thing the pastors protect is the communion and local fellowship. They protect the communion table and the fellowship that it represents. So we protect the first of our Lord's ordinances, baptism that governs who we allow and disallow into membership. We also protect the second

ordinance, the Lord's table, communion; which is a symbolic meal. And the communion table portrays the basis of the church's fellowship, which is spiritual participation in Christ.

What undergirds or upholds our regular celebration of the Lord's Table is a practice of discipline, church discipline. Often we hear the reference to church discipline. We're thinking about the negative side of disciplines, the discipline, the corrective side, and that kinda, kinda raises our adrenaline level and stirs internal tension because we have to address uncomfortable, unpleasant stuff.

But as we're in Matthew 18, part of your Bible's already warmed up. You can look at verse Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins, go show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've won your brother." Yay, won your brother. You've actually sought the lost sheep, found him, brought him back, and there's great rejoicing in your heart and in heaven as well.

"But if he doesn't listen to you," verse 16, "take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, let them be to you as the Gentile, the tax

collector.” Those who refuse to humble themselves and repent may no longer fellowship with the local church, may no longer partake at the Lord's Table, not until they repent.

It is shocking to see how few evangelical churches practice corrective church discipline, how few pastors have the stomach for it. They readily admit it's in the Bible. They even claim to agree with it, but either ignorantly or willfully, they refuse to practice it. They just don't have the stomach for it these days. Many pastors don't confront people who are sinning, won't teach people how to confront sin. They skirt around that duty.

They justify themselves in doing so, by kinda misappropriating the concept of grace, perverting any resemblance to biblical grace. They say we just want to be gracious with people, and that just helps them feel justified in their conscience, that they can avoid a comfort, an uncomfortable confrontation with proud sinners. You never have to deal with the blowback.

Churches like that, pastors like that are not doing their duty to protect the church, and they will be held accountable by God for that negligence, whether it's due to cowardice or pragmatism or whatever it is. But the arms of the fellowship are



open wide to all who walk humbly before the Lord, who submit themselves to the authority of God's Word.

And this is the vast majority of the church, partaking of the church's formative discipline, receiving the pastor's instruction and exhortation, receiving the exhortation and teaching that comes out of the, the, different teaching venues in the church and that's taken up among the entire congregation. And, and we encourage one another day after day and exhort one another.

That's formative church discipline. It's happening all the time, happening very positively in our midst. So baptism, communion, protecting the church's entrance ordinance, and fellowship ordinance, ensuring by God's grace there's a regenerate membership and a humble, submissive, obedient membership.

Third thing the pastors protect is ordination and eldership. Ordination and eldership or ordination and leadership. Paul tells Timothy in first, 2 Timothy 2:2 find faithful men. He says, "the things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses. Entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others," also.

Takes time to see faithfulness, doesn't it? In his first letter, 1 Timothy 3:1 to 7, his letter to Titus, in Titus 1:5 to 9, Paul lists the qualifications a man has to fulfill to serve as an elder. He has to be tested, examined. It takes time. Close observation of his life, gain sufficient knowledge of his life, marriage, family, overall testimony, his habits, his thinking, his disciplines, taking the necessary time, guarding against showing partiality. These are vital, vital for making a right judgement about a man's, a man's calling and qualification to ensure that the church is well served by good, godly, qualified leaders and not abused by bad, unqualified, neglectful leaders.

Go over to 1 Timothy 5, we want you to look at this 1 Timothy 5 verse 17 and following. Paul says this, again, so critical to move carefully with men who are coming forward for leadership duty. Paul says the elders, 1 Timothy 5:17, "the elders who lead well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor at preaching the word and teaching.

"For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing,' and 'the labor is worthy of his wages. Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, reprove in

the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God, and of Christ Jesus, and of his elect angels, to observe these instructions without bias, doing nothing in partiality. Don't lay hands upon anyone hastily, and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself pure."

So critical to move through the process of considering someone for leadership. Slowly, as careful as we are, they're still going to be mistakes made, hidden things not seen, not revealed until later. So Paul says in verses 24 and 25, "The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgement; for others, their sins follow after." But if their sins follow after on the basis of two or three witnesses, deal with the sins, that is the process of church discipline.

That is, elders cannot be shielded from the process of church discipline just because they're in leadership. Follow the process. He goes on and tells Timothy same thing with, with, good works. Good works are quite evident. Those that are otherwise cannot be concealed. If our Lord was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve men whom he himself appointed, if the future of Hymenaeus and Alexander's apostasy was hidden from Paul as those men arose in leadership in Ephesus

and had to be, he had to leave poor Timothy to deal with it because their sins were exposed and he had to deal with them.

Well, then who are we to believe that we could screen everyone perfectly, right? We just need to deal with what we know and what we see. We just need to be faithful to what we see. Don't need to go searching for it. Paul says here it'll come up and when it comes up deal with it. Nevertheless, the process of protecting the eldership is used of the Lord and it's used to weed out those who would endanger the flock, identify, elevate those who will love and serve the Lord in his flock as his under shepherds.

Always in our minds is the warning of Paul to the Ephesian elders. You can write this down. Don't need to turn there, but Acts 20 verses 28 to 31, as he's parting from them, leaving Ephesus to go back to Jerusalem where he's going to be arrested and then held in Caesarea for two years, then put on a boat, sent to Rome and be held there in imprisonment.

He knows he's not going to see these guys again. He says, "Be on guard for yourselves," in Acts 20:28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." And then this, "I know that after

my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and even from among your own selves' men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be watchful."

He's saying be watchful about external threats and internal threats. Be watchful. "Remembering that night and day for a period of three years, I didn't cease to admonish each one with tears." If it happened then to Timothy and Paul, it's going to happen now to the likes of us as well. And Paul continues in that section, telling the elders to observe his example. It's a reliable pattern to examine men for leadership. Again, that observation takes time, impartial judgement.

A fourth thing pastors protect in the church and structures is their affirmation and partnership. We have to protect the fellowship of the church, internally and externally, and we have to also protect the fellowship between churches and among ministers and with institutions and organizations. As pastors and elders, we have to be careful who we're affirming, what we're affirming. Because, especially in a media saturated modern world, Christians need help to sift through the myriad of voices that are always vying for their attention, calling for

their vote, calling for their affirmation, calling for their participation.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, and that's about spiritual partnership and fellowship, joining common cause with unbelievers, which here refers to religious unbelievers in religious tasks, religious endeavors. So pastors and elders have to avoid affirmations, associations, partnership, participation of a religious nature that cause Christians to stumble or confuse Christian witness to the watching world. We can't bring a reproach upon Christ. Now, that's a lot and I know that it was a lot to try to digest. You're probably going to have to go back and listen again and just take some notes and think. But I can just assure you that is only the briefest of surveys on pastoral ministry.

The subject of pastoring has, has, has filled volumes upon volumes that I'm just working my way through over time in my ministry. I just tried to summarize you a few of the chief duties of a biblical shepherd to instruct, exhort, protect the flock of God in the abiding judgement of church history.

I really am saying nothing than what faithful shepherds of the past have said and what they have practiced, the legacy of their lives and their ministries, all that we study and follow.

I cannot tell you, though, how much opposition us pastors face and pastors in any faithful church face, as they pursue their duties in these difficult days.

And also how much we are loved and appreciated by God's people who are often wandering for sometimes years through vast waterless places, spiritual deserts, where there is in this country, by God's judgment, a famine in the land for hearing the Word of God. And they wander here and there looking for a faithful church. And they, when they land on one like ours, like others, we know, they're so grateful. They're in such deep need and they know it for instruction, and exhortation, and protection.

But we are polarizing figures for sure. Pastors, elders, faithful are lightning rods in the culture. There's a dividing line and this is an experience that we grow to understand that Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 16. Here's what he says, he says, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in his triumphal procession in Christ. And he manifests through us the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one, the aroma from death

to death, to the other an aroma," of life or, "from life to life."

There are many today, it's really less among the irreligious, among the atheists, among the worldly, the secularized, it's, it's really more among the religious that they react angrily when they sense the fragrance of, fragrance of, Christ in a pastor's ministry. I've watched this for decades as a Christian, as well-known courageous shepherds like John MacArthur or RC Sproull or lesser known but equally faithful shepherds, like Tom Askel, Don Green, Moses Estrada, Russ Brewer; others are treated with suspicion, hostility, disdain.

They're the subject of malicious attacks and terrible slanders. What's their crime? Telling the truth. Staying faithful to their calling, just trying to be the best pastor that they can, to love people, love God, love his people. But the strategy of the enemy is always to discredit faithful pastors. Just as the scribes and the Pharisees tried to do with Jesus, to trouble the sheep, turn them away from following after the ministry of faithful men. Because Satan loves to mangle souls.

The tactic in our modern day is to portray these pastors as unloving, harsh, abusive, which is diametrically the opposite of

what they truly are, who God knows them to be, who the faithful know them to be. But there are many today who are doctrinally weak, biblically illiterate, religious hypocrites who are unable to attack the sound exegesis coming out of the pulpit. They have no interest in the truth anyway.

So what they do is they react against the exhortation because the exhortation is what presses them, exposes their will, and confronts their sins. They react in suspicion, and fear, and anger. They become hostile, they strike out and they disrupt others in the flock. They start crying abuse, and unloving. They begin a character assassination campaign to show this guy to be unloving, ungracious.

None other than John Piper identified this more than 15 years ago in something he wrote; he stated this, quote. "Not feeling loved and not being loved are not the same. Jesus loved all people well and many did not like the way he loved them." End Quote. We've seen that over and over in the Gospel of Luke, haven't we? Led to his crucifixion, didn't it?

John Piper continues with this. He says, "I have seen so much emotional blackmail in my ministry, I am jealous to raise a warning against it. Emotional blackmail happens when a person equates his or her emotional pain with another person's failure

to love. They are not the same. A person may love well and the beloved still feel hurt and use the hurt to blackmail the lover into admitting guilt that he or she does not have.

"Emotional blackmail says, if I feel hurt by you, you are guilty. There is no defense. The hurt person has become God. His emotion has become judge and jury. Truth does not matter. All that matters is the sovereign suffering of the aggrieved. It is above question. This emotional device is a great evil. I've seen it often in my three decades of ministry and I'm eager to defend people who are being wrongly indicted by it." End Quote.

That's spot on from John Piper. Emotional blackmail is how proud, wicked goats, false sheep in our woke grievance oriented time, everybody pulling out and playing the victim card. They use this tactic to undermine and malign good men, faithful shepherds, faithful pastors. They're the aroma of death to those people, those faithful pastors. But among those who are being saved, a fragrance of Christ to God, an aroma from life to life.

And in this true pastors and shepherds find such great joy and satisfaction. It's because we believe that we speak and through speaking in our ministry, through your ministry as well, so many are saved and sanctified to the glory of God. Many hear the Word of God, walk in blessed obedience to the Word. They

learn to practice the wisdom and the fear of the Lord. They grow in holiness and this leads them into the blessedness of God to share in this communicable attribute of blessedness of God, to share in his divine happiness and joy. That is what we want as faithful shepherds for all of Christ's sheep.

Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 2:17. He recalls his, he recalls his calling; he reaffirms that. He says, who's sufficient for these things? Who's sufficient? For we're not like many who peddled the word of God, but as from sincerity, as from God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ. What do we speak in Christ, words of instruction, words of exhortation, which together provide protection. That's how we inform, the, the, protection informs and directs how pastors are exercising their oversight.

We administrate the Church, protect any of Christ's little ones from stumbling, and in this whole process, through imperfect men, God still gives grace and he gives the increase, and he adds blessing upon blessing and joy upon joy, leading us all into satisfaction and gratitude as we walk forward in abundant joy and have full, effective, fruitful lives, and a good stewardship that we can offer to him in the end. It's what

it's all about, pleasing our God, doing his will, loving him with all of our hearts, soul, strength, and mind. Let's pray.

Our Father, we're so grateful to you for appointing the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Good Shepherd. Where men have failed repeatedly, failing in their kingship, failing in the priesthood, failing as prophets, failing as mediators, failing as shepherds and leaders. In the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no failure whatsoever but absolute perfection. And by your grace, by your Spirit, you have united us to Christ.

We all partake of his shepherding ministry. He who laid himself down for the flock, who died to save his own people, He's shown himself to be trustworthy in every way. Help us never to doubt him. Help us to identify the voice of the Good Shepherd in those under shepherds, in whatever church they are, and to come to that voice and to trust those ministries. Help us to turn away all that would defile, all that would cause stumbling, and let us fix our gaze upon Christ, his Word, his Spirit, and your face, father. For the sake of your glory we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, and by the power of the Holy Spirit and in his ministry in our lives, we pray. Amen.