

Shepherds and Their Flock. God's Design

Acts 20:28-32

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Acts 20:31-32 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I. The Place of Pastors in the Church

Acts 20:28-30 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, **in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And **he gave** the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

How does God appoint shepherds?

- God gives some men pastoral gifts.
- These gifts are developed in gaining knowledge and practical experience of ministry.
- Then God creates certain conditions where these men grow in the maturity of their character.
- God places them into a specific ministry context where their faithfulness is displayed and proven.
- God gives each particular local church the ability to see and recognize the pastoral gifts of these brethren and God's calling on them to minister.

Voting for ministers in the church is not an administrative, and even less so a political process. Rather it is a deeply spiritual process. Approaching it, each member of the church should seek to understand God's will: "Does this person possess the gift of pastor from God?" "Is he called by the Lord to pastor at this specific time and in this particular church?"

The Church does not appoint pastors. Instead, the church recognizes the men, who have been called to pastoral ministry and given to this congregation by God.

II. The Responsibility of Pastors before God

Acts 20:28-30 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, **in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.**²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those **who will have to give an account.** Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

1 Pet. 5:1-4 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.⁴ **And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.**

III. The Responsibility of Pastors before the Flock

Acts 20:28-30²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.**²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

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The main task of a shepherd is to provide the sheep with healthy food, clean water and a safe environment where they can grow.

Eph. 4:11-13 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Shepherding God's people means leading people to Christ, teaching them how to live out Christ in their lives, and helping them to do so!

Colossians 1:27-29 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

After saving a person, Christ does not remove him from earth to the glory of heaven at once. He allows him to live to God's glory joyfully and freely here, in the midst of pain and suffering, on this sin-stricken earth.

Galatians 4:19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

John 21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

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Phil. 3:12-17 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Colossians 2:6-9 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

IV. The Responsibility of the Flock to the Pastors

A. Respect your Pastors

1 Thess. 5:12-13 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

How can we respect pastors?

We can...

- understand that they have been appointed by God to this ministry.
- recognize the complexity and responsibility of their ministry.
- be thankful to God for them.
- appreciate them for the work that God has entrusted to them.
- encourage them
- support them.
- refrain from speaking ill of pastors.

Ps. 15:1-3 O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

B. Obey your Pastors

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

C. Pray for your Pastors.

1 Thess. 5:25 Brothers, pray for us.

Ephesians 6:18-19 ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

Colossians 4:3-4 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

- Pray for God's power for shepherds.
- Pray for their personal knowledge of Christ and depth of life in Him.
- Pray for God's protection from sin and the attacks of the devil.
- Pray for God's work in their hearts as they search the Scriptures.
- Pray for their sermons and pastoral conversations with people.
- Pray for God's action through them in their ministry.
- Pray for their health.
- Pray that they will not be discouraged in the midst of many difficulties.
- Pray for their faithfulness in life and ministry.
- Pray for their families.

As officers in Christ's army, we are the special target of the hostility of men and devils; they watch for our faltering and work to trip us at the heels. We are faced with many difficult problems, and our minds are in despair. We want to benefit you with our preaching; we desire to be a blessing to your children; we strive to be useful to both saints and sinners; therefore, dear brethren, intercede for us before our God. We are unhappy if we are deprived of the help of your prayers¹.

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgden, Morning by Morning, 194