

SERMON NOTES:

Perilous Waters | *Navigating the Dangerous Currents Shaping the Church*

Part 5: Authority Without Abuse

BIG Idea: The answer to abusive authority is not the absence of authority, but authority restored to the pattern of Christ.

Application: Learn to recognize biblical spiritual authority, place yourself willingly under healthy shepherding, and remain humble enough to receive both the care and correction Christ provides through His Church.

Join us as we read the Bible together in 2026.

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Who gets to tell me that I'm wrong?

Does anybody actually have spiritual authority in my life?

And now we have two problems:

Shepherds who refuse to live under authority.

And:

Sheep who refuse to live under authority.

The answer to abusive authority is not the absence of authority, but authority restored to the pattern of Christ.

1. God has something to say to bad shepherds.

Ezekiel 34:2-6 New Living Translation

²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? ³You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. ⁴You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. ⁵So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd, and they are easy prey for any wild animal. ⁶They have wandered through all the mountains and all the hills, across the face of the earth, yet no one has gone to search for them.”

Jeremiah 23:1-2 (NLT)

¹ “What sorrow awaits the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were expected to care for,” says the Lord.

²Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to these shepherds: “Instead of caring for my flock and leading them to safety, you have deserted them and driven them to destruction. Now I will pour out judgment on you for the evil you have done to them.”

2. Jesus didn't abolish authority – He put it under His authority.

Matthew 20:25-28 (NLT)

²⁵ But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. ²⁶But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NLT)

¹ And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: ²Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. ³Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. ⁴And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

The Great Shepherd. (The Chief Shepherd.)

Biblical authority is always authority under authority.

3. Christ gives shepherds to protect and keep His flock together.

Acts 20:28-30 (NLT)

²⁸ “So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders. ²⁹I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following.”

“You are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ.”¹

“Where the shepherd is, there follow as sheep.”²

“You are going to answer to Christ.”³

Hebrews 13:17 (NLT)

¹⁷ Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

Everybody is under Christ.

4. Faithful shepherding cares enough to tell the truth.

2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NLT)

¹ I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: ² Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.

There is a difference between someone trying to **control your life** and someone who loves you enough to **tell you the truth about your life**.

Healthy spiritual authority should be recognizable by where it keeps pointing.

Ezekiel 34:11-12 (NLT) *The Good Shepherd*

¹¹ “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search and find my sheep. ¹² I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day.”

John 10:11 (NLT)

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.”

The answer is shepherds and sheep together under the authority of the Good Shepherd.

¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallians* 2. Ignatius exhorts the Trallian Christians to live in proper relationship with their bishop and presbyters, connecting ecclesial unity with faithfulness to Christ.

² Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 2. The larger context is particularly important for this sermon: Ignatius warns against division and deceptive teachers whom he compares with wolves before exhorting Christians to remain with their shepherd.

³ Polycarp of Smyrna, *Letter to the Philippians* 6. Polycarp's instructions to presbyters emphasize compassion, restoration of the wandering, care for vulnerable people, freedom from greed and partiality, restraint in judgment, and awareness of their own accountability before Christ.