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*“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,”* Mark 9:24.

*“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,”* John 12:21.

**ACTS 20**

<sup>28</sup>“Always keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. <sup>29</sup>I know that after my departure savage wolves, who will not spare the flock, will come in among you. <sup>30</sup>Even from your own group men will rise up, twisting the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup>Therefore be always on the alert! Remember that for three years, night and day, I never stopped warning each one of you with tears.

<sup>32</sup>“And now I entrust you to God and to the Word of His grace, which has power to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.



Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He has a great deal of love. Are we aware of the spiritual dangers of bad shepherding?

I remember the first time I was scared of a werewolf. I was very young. The very idea that—every 14 nights, on a full moon—a human being would turn into a ferocious wolf was enough to keep me up at night. Then my older brothers were watching the music video “Thriller,” and the werewolf was Michael Jackson. I was afraid. Michael Jackson didn’t only turn into a werewolf, but then for a majority of the movie danced as a zombie with other haunted beings. Finally, at the end of his video, after Michael wakes up his girlfriend and it’s all a dream, he glances back at the audience with his eyes aglow with a yellow light. We never did find out whether Michael Jackson was really an undead monster.

Now of course we can look back on the best music video in history and enjoy it for its dance. There’s no such thing as werewolves and zombies, but there are spiritual powers of darkness. There are evil spirits cast out of heaven before the beginning and Jesus did cast out demons during his earthly ministry. There are also spiritual werewolves, ferocious false teachers, who teach contrary to God’s Word. Not only that, but they can arise, not just from outside the church, but from within the visible church and poison the body of believers with falsehoods.

This is what Paul warned the believers in Ephesus after pouring out his love and the love of Christ for some time; false teachers would come in later without the love of Christ and with no love for the truth. It is a constant danger in the church, as ...

## **Nobody Can Feed Christ's Sheep Without Christ's Love**

### **1. They are responsible for the flock to which they are called**

To get an idea of the love involved, remember how much traveling St. Paul did in the book of Acts. He was a missionary who rarely stayed in one place. But in Ephesus, Paul spent three exciting years among the Christians in instruction and warning. He developed a sense of urgency for them and an emotional connection. Paul desired for each of them to be closer to Jesus, because Paul knew the risks of being a believer and the continuous onslaught from the world of unbelievers. Paul's time in Ephesus became three years of tears, and you and I have a glimpse of his tearful goodbye. For God had extended to Paul a new divine call to a different flock in a different place.

Sure enough, "*savage wolves*" came after Paul left and did "*not spare the flock.*" They weren't physically wolves, but they were men who became spiritual predators. These spiritual werewolves did come and did speak misleading things. We do learn later on that Paul sent Timothy in the aftermath of these wolves to instruct men not to teach strange doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3). We learn a couple of their names were Hymenaeus and Alexander, who blasphemed, rejected conscience, and shipwrecked their own faith (1 Tim. 1:19-20). We also learn about a Philetus with Hymenaeus, who together said the resurrection is already past (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Instead of being a shepherd to that soul, they became savage wolves to it; instead of being its physicians, they became its murderers; instead of being angels of God, they became devils.

So the elders were exhorted to always tend the flock to which the Holy Spirit has called them (v 28). Always keep watch (v 31). Just as Jesus said to Peter, "*Feed my lambs.*" He said this three times, "*Feed my lambs.*" They weren't Peter's lambs, but they were Christ's. They were Christ's lambs, but they were Peter's spiritual responsibility. Just as Peter could not manage to feed all of Christ's lambs, so Peter would be called to specific groups of the flock in exact locations.

This is part of the beauty of the call to be an undershepherd. It is great and difficult and costly. Yet it has a limited scope. We have been informed of our doctrine of the divine call from verse 28 just because of the way it is worded, *“The whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers.”* The elders (a.k.a., pastors) of the flock that Paul left behind were not called to every congregation in the world. They were given that flock in Ephesus to shepherd constantly. They were called to be on call and keep vigilant and feed the sheep.

That call in itself is a burdensome task. I am convicted this week from these lessons about what the Good Shepherd does, and what His undershepherds ought to do. I don't call you enough, chase you down enough, pray for you enough, be there for you enough. But *“Christ's commands are not burdensome”* (1 John 5:3) when the undershepherd rests in the love of the great Good Shepherd. The pastor of a flock gains the same comfort from the same place that you do—from the love of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who labored with His soul, on many nights prayed all night long. He committed His beloved sheep into the hands of the Father. He grazed His sheep in the means of grace and in His love, continues to be among them in Word and sacrament. He is still with you: to call, to chase you down, to plead with the Father for you, to be there for you, to forgive you. Let pastors remember ...

## **2. They speak to a flock which Christ redeemed**

Does the fact that savage wolves will come mean the Church has a bleak future? Every moment the Church is in danger. Jesus Himself had said to *“beware of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ferocious wolves”* (Matt. 7:15). *“False Christs and false prophets would come to deceive,”* even the elect if that were possible (Matt. 24:24). Every moment the Church is in danger.

So it is useful to remember this about Christ's love: He bought the flock of Ephesus with His own blood (v 28). He bought every soul and every lamb Himself.

Again, verse 28 shapes our understanding of Christian teaching. Paul says, *“Shepherd the church of God, which HE purchased with His own blood.”* That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would offer His own blood for mistake-ridden sinners and wandering sheep? This shows the riches of God's grace, which is worth far more than silver and gold.

But look even closer. We aren't just told that it is the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son. His blood is called the blood of God. In verse 28 we again have proof of the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice. Theologically speaking, God doesn't have blood. God is spirit, incorporeal, without a physical body. He isn't vulnerable or weak. He doesn't bleed. He doesn't have blood to shed.

But the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is also true God, was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem. He took on human blood. He assumed human flesh and blood and soul and lived a human life. He did this for one purpose—to be among the flock and shepherd us with His own life. He did not have to die for us. He did not have to be thrown to the wolves who took that blood from Him. But Christ laid it down of His own accord. The Good Shepherd loved us and loves us still.

This is not a change of natures, as if Christ's divine nature were altered and made into human nature. Instead, God's Word communicates the attributes of the human nature (e.g., "blood") not only to Christ as man but also to Christ as God. Although Jesus is also true man, the whole person of Jesus Christ is true God, and God's Word frequently speaks about Him like that.

It is more haunting than "Thriller" to think that God died for us, for even in the classic music video, nobody is put to death. Thriller is more of a setup to reminisce and enjoy old thriller films. The death of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, hearkens back to the Good Shepherd of the Old Testament. He identifies as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of redemption and rescue from evil.

So Paul committed the Ephesian pastors to God and to His Word of grace, which build up, give inheritance, and sanctifies (v 32). Notice there is little difference between God's action and the action of His Word. A faithful shepherd teaches God's Word in its truth and purity. He brings the love of Christ.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.