

**Therefore, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and as one who also shares in the glory that is about to be revealed, I appeal to the elders among you: <sup>2</sup>Shepherd God’s flock that is among you, serving as overseers, not grudgingly but willingly, as God desires, not because you are greedy for money but because you are eager to do it. <sup>3</sup>Do not lord it over those entrusted to your care, but be examples for the flock. <sup>4</sup>And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive an unfading crown of glory. (EHV)**

Theme: Pastors—The Under-Shepherds of the Chief Shepherd

1. He cares for God’s flock
2. He will share in their glory

What is the best title for someone in my position? There are a number of them that you could choose, of course. Some, use the term “Father” because they serve as spiritual fathers, of sorts. Others use “priest” because of a connection, albeit not a very strong one, between their ministry and those of the Old Testament priests. Others may refer to someone in my position as “preacher” because preaching is where they see him most. Some may even be called “Reverend” because they are to be revered for their person and character. “Minister” is also used, a minister is one who serves, and those in my position serve others with the gospel.

There are any number of words we can use. In our text Peter uses the word, “elder.” This word is not in reference to the age of the individual, but the position. Today, we use the term “elder” for lay-members who assist the Pastor with watching over the spiritual lives of the congregation—dealing especially with those who are inactive. This term is used here by Peter in a similar way, except in relation to called workers, those who had been called by the Holy Spirit to their position. This term came from older Jewish men who were in charge of the synagogue, and so it is used for those who are in charge of a congregation.

Peter also uses the term, “Overseer,” telling the elders that they were to serve as overseers. This term is self-explanatory. They are those who oversee the spiritual lives of the people entrusted to their care. And as such, they preach and teach the word, administer the sacraments, counsel, and on and on.

Some of these terms that we have mentioned are better than others, but they are all good each in their own way. The term, however, that we use more often than not is, “Pastor”—and for good reason! In verse two Peter writes, **Shepherd God’s flock that is among you.** That is what a pastor is, that is what the term, “pastor” means: shepherd.

A pastor is a spiritual shepherd. Like an overseer, he watches over the spiritual lives of God’s flock, the sheep that have been entrusted under his care. And as the one who watches over the spiritual lives of God’s sheep, a pastor typically preaches God’s Word, administers the sacrament teaches young and old, he counsels, he visits the sick and the shut-ins, he steers the course of direction of a congregation—the list goes on and on.

Because the Pastor is so front and center in the congregation, the one who is continuously involved in the congregation, so many have the tendency to focus too much on the Pastor and not enough on Christ. They are concerned about whether or not the pastor is funny or down-to-earth. They want to know if the Pastor can equally relate to the three-year old in Sunday School, or the 103 year old in the nursing home. They are concerned about where the Pastor grew up, what his

hobbies are, and if he dresses nicely or like a slob. We can go on and on about all the trivial and inconsequential things people focus on when it comes to their pastors.

But it's not just that—they also put too much emphasis on the pastor. We also see people join congregations simply because of the pastor, or leave congregations when the Pastor is no longer there, or not attend worship all that much because the pastor is too boring, too long-winded, not relatable enough, and any number of other excuses people come up with. So we see a tendency to give too much credit to the Pastor when things are going well—it's because we have such a great leader, or he is such a good preacher, or he is good with kids, etc. But if the Pastor gets the credit when things are going well, then he also gets the blame when things aren't going well. "If only he was funnier, if only he was better able to relate to his people, if only he was better at evangelism...then we'd really grow and thrive!"

But the truth is the pastors are normal people just like you with certain gifts and abilities, but also with certain weaknesses and shortcomings. While Pastors are to be above reproach, they are far from perfect—they are nothing but miserable sinners just like the rest of us, a weak and defenseless sheep. For each and every time that you love your pastor and give him credit for something, there are many more times that your pastor will let you down or you can blame him for something.

So we do well not to focus so much the Pastors. Because it's not about who the Pastor is, it's about Christ! Pastors may be shepherds, but Christ is the Chief-shepherd, the head shepherd of the sheep. This is Good Shepherd Sunday, after all, and Jesus refers to himself as the **Good Shepherd** in John 10; and the Writer to the Hebrews calls Jesus, the **Great Shepherd of the sheep**. Pastors are merely under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus.

Yes, the Pastor works together with the council, Elders, and the Voters' but ultimately, he is answerable to Christ and serves him first and foremost. There may be times when the pastor does something that we don't like or that we don't approve of. But we remember that the pastor is not here to serve us in a way that he does everything we want him to do. Rather a pastor will strive to do what God wants him to do.

In our gospel for today Jesus says, I am the Good Shepherd. **I know my sheep and my sheep know me**. The job of any pastor is to make sure that God's sheep know Christ—they know him as the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep. So every pastor should strive to down-play himself and lift up Christ. It's one of the reasons we wear robes—to cover ourselves up so that you're not focused on us, but on Christ and his grace!

Because it should be all about Christ! It's all about Christ because you are his flock, not the pastor's. Again, Peter in verse 2, **Shepherd God's flock that is among you**. You, the sheep, are sheep of God's pen. You belong to him; he knows you by name. You don't belong to the under-shepherds, but to the chief-shepherd!

It's about Christ because he is the one who gave up his life for his sheep. John 10, which we've already quoted, is the "Good Shepherd" chapter of the Bible. And Jesus says at the beginning of our gospel, **I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep**. You belong to Christ because you were purchased by his own blood. By his death on the cross he saved you from eternal damnation, he took away your sins and gave you his perfect life. You know that Christ loves you because he died for you. You know that Jesus alone is your Shepherd because he willingly gave up his life to save you, even though you constantly stray away from him.

It's all about Christ because he didn't remain dead! As he says in verse 17 of our gospel, **I lay down my life so that I may take it up again**. It's all about Christ because he not only paid for your sins and saved you from eternal damnation, but he also defeated death for you, because you were a weak and defenseless sheep against your enemies. No pastor did that for you. No pastor

saved you; no pastor paid for your sins by dying in your place, no pastor defeated death for you. Only Christ did! That's why we focus on Christ and not the Pastor!

It's all about Christ because by his death and resurrection he promises us an eternal glory! In verse one Peter says that along with the elders that he shared in the glory that will be revealed. And he tells them in verse four that they will receive an unfading crown of glory. This is the same crown of glory that the Lord promises all believers in Revelation two. Peter shares in this glory with them—it's the glory of Christ, and splendor and majesty that is his and that he promises to give us a share of in heaven. It's not Peter's glory to give, it's not any pastor's, but Christ's!

And it's an unfading glory because it's a glory that we'll have in heaven. And nothing good will be taken from us in heaven. This word for crown, refers to a victor's crown, like what Olympic champions would wear. It was a wreath made of green foliage, and as such, it was something whose color quickly faded before the leaves died, fell off and were thrown away. Not so with this unfading crown of glory. The same glory that it had when we first received it will always remain. It will never perish, spoil, or fade. But we'll have the same share in Christ's glory from the moment we die and into eternity!

It's a share of Christ and his glory, not the pastor's. So once again, the Pastor's job, as the under-shepherd of the Chief-shepherd, is to lead God's sheep to know Christ and his name. And what a great job it is—that I could actually make a living pointing people to their Savior, is both a great privilege and an amazing opportunity! A pastor shouldn't feel forced into serving God's sheep, or do so as a way to become rich; but he does so willingly and eagerly. Eagerly spreading the good news of salvation so that others may be brought under the care of the Good Shepherd and be saved!

And so any decent pastor, any pastor worth his salt, leads the sheep under his care to see Christ. Yes, he may be the spiritual overseer of a particular portion of God's flock and he is their leader; but not their master. As Paul writes in verse 3, **Do not lord it over those entrusted to your care, but be examples for the flock.** He doesn't force people into following him, bully them, or otherwise domineer them in order to get his way, but he serves as an example for the sheep to follow. God's sheep know Christ and they know his Word. So the Pastor, as a sheep, immerses himself in God's Word, listening to his voice again and again, and then he shares that Word to God's sheep so they may know and recognize the Lord's voice as the voice of their shepherd and follow him into eternal glory.

Out of all the titles you can use, perhaps "Pastor" is the best because not only is a biblical, but it also encapsules what he does. But in the end, it doesn't matter too much what you call him; just as it doesn't really matter who he is. It matters who the Good Shepherd is and as long as your pastor leads you to hear the voice of him who laid down his life you, that's all that matters. For he is the Lord, in whose house you will dwell forever. Amen.