



Course Name: Shepherds/Elders (The Wolf)

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Course description:

One of the greatest challenges facing shepherds involves protecting the sheep from wolves. How do you keep misguided people from wrecking your congregation? In this lesson, attention is given to biblical direction for shepherds in addressing those who tend to discourage and divide the sheep, who disrupt leadership, and who leave once they have destroyed the congregation.

Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will have...

- A. Identified what is and what is not a wolf in the church.
- B. Studied the biblical approach for dealing with wolves.
- C. Considered a plan to prevent wolves from destroying the sheep.

Outline of the class:

- A. During the first few minutes of the class divide the class into groups of three or four. Then ask each table to take 15-20 minutes to discuss the following.
 1. List how you would describe a wolf in the church today.
 2. How do wolves work among sheep?
 3. Write down three ways shepherds can approach wolves in a congregation today.
- B. Coping with “wolves” is only one aspect of *Church Discipline*.
 1. Discipline was clearly a part of early church life.
 2. This discipline had 2 positive effects: (1) *restoration* of those who fall into sin, and (2) *protection* of the church from unholy influences.
 3. Disciplining “wolves” has to do mostly with (2) *protection* – a God-given means of protecting the church from those who would otherwise create havoc in it.
 4. Since discipline is rarely practiced today, many “wolves” are left unchallenged. This must change!
 - a. A Warning from Paul: “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.” Acts 20:29-30
 - b. A Warning from Jesus: “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” John 10:12-13

5. The Point:
 - a. “Wolves” are a reality that must be faced by shepherds.
 - b. “Wolves” will not spare the sheep; that is their nature – to destroy sheep.
 - c. The reaction of the shepherd when a “wolf” approaches is a matter of life and death.

- C. Bad News / Good News
 1. *Bad News*: Wolves will eventually arise in any church.
 2. *Good News*: Scripture tells us how to deal with them effectively.
 3. *Question*: Will we do what Scripture says in order to “care for the church of God”?

- D. Shepherds have only 2 choices
 1. Learn to identify wolves and how to deal with them, or
 2. Step aside and let others assume these roles.

Claiming to be a shepherd while refusing to confront the wolf is **not an option.*

- E. What a Wolf is *NOT*
 1. A wolf is not an immature Christian who needs to grow.
 2. A wolf is not someone who disagrees with you.
 3. A wolf is not a troublesome member who needs constant maintenance.

- F. Three Groups within Any Church
 1. Sheep – willing to be led, create no difficulties
 2. Goats – difficult, but not destructive, people
 3. Wolves – those whose attitudes, actions, and/or teachings are genuinely destructive and who refuse correction.

**It is vitally important to know the difference*

- G. How to Spot a Wolf
 1. Acts 20:28-30
 - a. They “speak twisted things” – either false teaching or any divisive talk (lying, gossip, etc.).
 - b. Wolves almost always use perverse speech to influence others negatively.
 - c. Purpose: “to draw away disciples *after them*.” Wolves are always looking for an audience and are seeking more affirmation than they are receiving.
 - d. Result: They care more about their status and getting their way than about the good of the church. *This is what sets wolves apart from others.*
 - e. Note: Wolves can come in from outside or arise “from among your own selves.”

2. 3 John 9-10 Diotrephes, the most famous wolf in the Bible
 - a. He had his own agenda for the church.
 - b. He acknowledged no authority but his own.
 - c. He used slander to discredit those who disagreed with him.
 - d. He stopped the good works of others because he could not control them.
 - e. He “de-churched” anyone who disagreed with him.
 *Note: John had no intention of letting Diotrephes get away with this but would confront him when he came. *When leaders stand up to a wolf, he/she will usually go away.*
3. Titus 3:10-11
 - a. Those who prefer controversy to good works are to be warned, then rejected.
 - b. *Hairetikos* = “a divisive person”; not necessarily a false teacher.
 - c. People who insist on discussing their pet issues regardless of the consequences, because it makes them seem (in their eyes) more knowledgeable.
 - d. Warn him “once and then twice” – no more, no less. Then, “have nothing more to do with him.”
 - e. Paul describes such people as “warped and sinful,” “self-condemned.” *This is what sets a wolf apart from someone who simply has a difference of opinion: no amount of teaching, pleading, or warning, will cause them to see the harm they do.*
 - f. It is not easy to conclude that someone is “warped and sinful” – but some people are!
4. Matthew 7:13-20
 - a. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”
 - b. In context, it is probably those who want to “widen the gate” (vv. 13-14).
 - c. They are known by their “fruits” – i.e., by the outcome of their teaching.
 - d. Especially: Does their teaching draw people closer to Christ, or only closer to themselves? Are they protecting the church, or using it for their own ends?
 - e. It must not be that hard: “You *will* recognize them by their fruits.”
5. Romans 16:17-18
 - a. Without doubt, they are false teachers because their teaching is contrary to apostolic doctrine.
 - b. The people Paul discusses in Romans 16 “do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.” Self-promoters versus gospel-promoters.

- c. Tools: smooth talk, flattery, deception.
 - d. What to do: “watch out” for them, and “avoid them.”
6. 1 Timothy 1:3-7
- a. Two problems at Ephesus: “different doctrines” and “worthless discussions.”
 - b. Their motive: They wanted to be teachers, even though unqualified.
 - c. Wolves often desire leadership roles for which they are unsuited, and so they promote themselves to others.
 - d. The action: Confront them and tell them to stop.
 - e. What if that failed? Presumably, full withdrawal of fellowship would follow.
7. 2 Timothy 2:14-19
- a. Two more New Testament wolves whose names we know: Hymenaeus and Philetus.
 - b. “Swerved from the truth” by claiming the resurrection had already occurred.
 - c. Result: They were “upsetting the faith of some.”
 - d. “Irreverent babble” produced *ungodliness*, rather than leading people to be more like Christ.
 - e. If not rebuked, “their talk will spread like gangrene.”
 - f. This is what happens when wolves are allowed to have their way!
- H. Portrait of a Wolf
- 1. Creates division and confusion, either by teaching error or insisting on discussing a pointless issue.
 - 2. Seeks to gain a following for him/herself, often by insisting on a leadership role, qualified or not.
 - 3. Exalts him/herself and is determined to have his/her own way, regardless of the cost to the church or at the expense of truth.
 - 4. Has no regard for the spiritual welfare of other believers, only for personal aggrandizement.
 - 5. Disregards or seeks to undermine the duly appointed leaders of the church.
- I. Who Will Stand Up to the Wolf?
- “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.” Acts 20:28

Conclusion:

- A. The Bible is clear when identifying what wolves look like within the church. Shepherds have a great responsibility to know and address wolves when they enter.
- B. If shepherds fail to stand up to these wolves, they will work to discourage, disrupt, divide, and destroy the congregation. This is why Jesus and Paul warn us about the dangers of allowing wolves to continue.
- C. Take the next few weeks to work on developing a plan within the congregation and among the shepherds as to how you will identify and address wolves when they arise within the church (see the lesson on “Courage”).