

SERMON DELIVERED AT THE SUNDAY COMMUNION SERVICE

by

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Text: **I Peter 5:2**

Dear fellow-redeemed sinners, purchased by the Good Shepherd in His own blood and thus ransomed for heaven:

It's not listed in the Table of Duties, or in "certain passages of Scripture for various holy orders and estates whereby these are severally to be admonished as to their office and duty" in Section III of Dr. Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*. But our text clearly states what the passages that are cited state (II Timothy 3:2, 3, 4, 6; Titus 1:9) as to the essential work of pastors. It was chosen because of the specific reference to "*the flock of God*," the local congregation, in order to give the basis for admonition regarding *The God-ordained Participation of Christians in the Local Congregation*, the title of our doctrinal essay at this 55th annual convention.

May God open our ears and hearts to His Word as we hear

The God-Ordained Duty of Christian Pastors in the Local Congregation.

Our three main points are these: **I.** *What* must Christian pastors do for their individual flocks (the local congregations to which they are called), as God clearly ordains? **II.** *How* should they do this in a God-pleasing and faithful manner, as God enjoins? And **III.** *Why* should their flock desire and cheerfully receive such faithful shepherding from their pastor?

I.

Our text is I Peter 5:2: "*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof,*

not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” **What** must Christian pastors do for their individual flocks? God, the Holy Ghost, says through the Apostle Peter: “*Feed the flock of God which is among you.*” At times the Lord uses a word that literally refers to providing food for the flock, as when our Lord told Peter in John 21: “*Feed my lambs...Feed my sheep*” (vv. 15, 17). The word that Jesus uses means to provide forage and pasturage so that the entire flock may eat to live and grow healthy. But here in our text we find a more general word that covers everything that a shepherd does for the flock. With a very strong imperative, God enjoins each pastor to “*shepherd*” the flock he has been called by God to serve, both lambs and sheep! Consider how extensive this is —how comprehensive! Since feeding is the chief duty, it is defined thus, but not to the exclusion of the rest of the work: to watch over the flock lest predators enter in, or enemies steal sheep and lambs, or individuals wander astray; to defend the sheep; to heal the wounded and minister to the sick; to seek out lost sheep and return them to the fold; in short, lovingly and unceasingly to do all that is necessary to take care of God’s flock as a good steward. The noun derived from this verb “*feed*” in our text is translated “*pastors*” in Ephesians 4:11 in reference to the only divinely-ordained office we now have (as a gift of the ascended Savior). Thereby we see that this comprehensive term defines the office; and one who does not do the work of “*shepherding*” is not truly worthy of the name “*pastor.*”

God has ordained the office of the Holy Ministry and clearly delineates what work is involved for the sake of His flock, that the Gospel prophecy of Hosea might stand fulfilled: “*Now the Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place*” (4:16). All pastors are thus enjoined to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), teaching all that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:20), as they watch over the souls (Hebrews 13:17) entrusted to their pastoral care by the Holy Spirit through the Divine Call of their respective individual Christian congregations. Likewise, St. Paul writes to Timothy: “*I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry*” (II Timothy 4:1-5). “*If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained*” (I Timothy 4:6). “*...Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all*” (I Timothy 4:13, 15). “*Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*” (I Timothy 4:16). “*Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (II Timothy 2:14-15). The pastor himself must feed upon the green grass and still water of God’s Word in order to be able to teach others by word and example.

The charge, that is, the group entrusted to a pastor’s care, is very clear and specific: “*The flock of God which is among you.*” This is the local congregation to which he has been called. In its **Solemn Call**, the members of the congregation authorize and obligate their pastor-elect:

To proclaim to us, jointly and severally, the Word of God in its full truth and purity as it is written in the verbally-inspired canonical books of the Old and New Testaments and professed in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, to wit, the *Book of Concord*

of 1580 and the *Brief Statement* of 1932 (II Timothy 4:1-2); to administer the Holy Sacraments in accordance with their divine institution (Matthew 28:19; I Corinthians 11:23-29); to discharge toward all the members of our congregation the functions of a pastor, overseer, and curate of their souls; to feed the church of God, rightly dividing the Law and Gospel in teaching and application in accordance with Holy Scripture; in particular to visit the sick and the dying and to admonish indifferent and erring members (Ephesians 4:11-12; Acts 20:28; II Timothy 2:15); to guide us in applying the divinely ordained discipline of the church in accordance with the Word of God (Matthew 18:15-17; I Timothy 5:20; Galatians 6:1; Titus 1:9-13); to do whatever is possible to promote thorough Christian education in the congregation for both young and old; to instruct prospective members in the Word of God as this is rightly set forth in the *Small Catechism* of Dr. Martin Luther, thus preparing them for communicant membership (John 21:15-17; I Corinthians 11:28); and to continue edifying those who are communicant members by constant instruction in the Word of Christ (II Peter 1:12; 3:18); to urge us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3; I Corinthians 1:10); and to warn and guard us against all errors and errorists in doctrine and practice (Ezekiel 3:17-21; Matthew 7:15; Romans 16:17-18); to serve the congregation as an example by his Christian conduct and, by the grace of God, to do all that is possible for him to do, within the limits of his calling, for the upbuilding of our congregation and for the general advancement of the Kingdom of Christ (Titus 2:7-8; II Corinthians 3:4-6; 4:1-18).

This is a Divine Call, a call from God, issued not directly but *mediately* through the congregation. It must be so, for God Himself owns the flock. Yes, note well *who* owns the flock, *to whom* the flock belongs: “*The flock of God.*” A pastor is only a steward. He must answer to the “*Chief Shepherd*” (v. 4) of souls, the “*Good Shepherd*” (John 10:11), who purchased the flock for heaven “*with His own [holy and precious] blood*” (Acts 20:28). As the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, loved us and gave Himself for us a perfect sin-atonement offering, without spot, to God. This ransom sacrifice is Christ’s propitiation or wrath-removing appeasement for all our sins (I John 2:2)! The Good Shepherd was both priest and victim: He offered Himself on the altar of the cross, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God (I Peter 3:18), having redeemed us from all iniquity (Titus 2:14) and thereby having reconciled us unto His heavenly Father (Romans 5:10) by virtue of His shed blood (I Peter 1:19). You know this very well, sheep and lambs: The purchase price of your salvation is that precious blood of God’s Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot! (I Peter 1:18). In and through Him, God Himself proclaims this Gospel-absolution: “*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*” (Isaiah 1:18). “*I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins*” (Isaiah 43:25). Isaiah also declared in prophecy: “*O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young*” (Isaiah 40:9-11).

Every pastor must look at every lamb and sheep as God’s purchased possession in the beloved Good Shepherd, who gave His life for them, according to prophetic promise: “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*” (Isaiah 53:6). Lest he be a hypocritical shepherd and, having preached to others, himself be a castaway (I Corinthians 9:27), every pastor should be under the constant conviction of the Spirit of God through the Gospel to believe that he, too, a fellow-sinner with the members of his flock, has been redeemed and therefore owes his own salvation to the

gracious work of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, “*who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*” (I Peter 2:24-25).

Christ is the Savior of all men, but especially of them that, by the gracious operation of the Spirit through the Gospel, believe. So, pastor, do the work of a shepherd as a faithful steward of God’s flock “*which is among you,*” the local congregation that you have been called by God to serve. Beware of becoming a busybody in other men’s affairs (I Peter 4:15); stay out of other men’s flocks. Don’t steal another pastor’s sheep. Don’t become entangled with the affairs of this life (II Timothy 2:4) to the neglect of the work. Keep your political opinions to yourself, your economic theories, your private judgments on non-spiritual matters, as Luther admonishes: “God has given us charge of the areas of economics and statecraft. *There* you may hear jurists and doctors, who belong unto the court of kings. But speak not of such things in the bridal chamber [that is, in the congregation of believers]; there speak of that alone which is of Christ... In this secret chamber the rule is to be: Out with jurists, away with philosophers, no matter what they may teach; here only the Word is to be heard; for the church should kiss no one and embrace no one but her Bridegroom” (E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. III, p. 1115).

Speaking then “*as the oracles of God*” (I Peter 4:11), the faithful shepherd is “*taking the oversight thereof,*” namely, of the flock of God which is “*among [him]*” (Text), his own local congregation. Oversight is literally *looking upon* or over the flock, not only as they assemble themselves together for worship, but also in individual teaching and admonition. This same word is translated “*looking diligently*” in another location (Hebrews 12:15). He who is charged with this *looking upon* is the pastor, the “*overseer*” of the flock. One is reminded especially of Paul’s admonition to the pastors in Ephesus about their oversight over the congregation that was among them: “*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears*” (Acts 20:28-31). Like Paul, a faithful pastor is to be ever vigilant, even to the point of tearful warnings!

II.

And this brings us to our second point: **How** should pastors do what they should do? Our text says: “*Not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.*” Pastors should serve, not because they must, not from force or compulsion, but because they want to. All truly good works are done without the coercion of the Law but motivated by the love of Christ and produced by a joyous and thankful heart, the believer’s faith working by love out of gratitude to Him who first loved us (I John 4:19). God works in our New Man both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13), as it is written: “*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning...*” (Psalm 110:3). Indeed God loves a cheerful giver (II Corinthians 9:7); He expects us freely to give, as God has given freely to us (Matthew 10:8). David speaks of the power of the Gospel enabling him to be a prophetic witness, when he says: “*Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee*” (Psalm 51:12-13).

Only the Gospel gives a Godpleasing desire for the office of the Holy Ministry and the willingness to do the actual shepherding of the flock! Pastors are to serve not for *dishonorable profit*, making the office a way to personal financial gain, but of a ready mind, a mind delighted to do it and to do it “*with joy*” (Cf. Hebrews 13:17). Our Lord brought this out when He challenged Peter to demonstrate his love for his Savior by feeding, that is by being a faithful shepherd to, His lambs and sheep (John 21:15-17). Every pastor is to emulate the gracious tender love of Christ toward each and every sheep and lamb entrusted to his care. Did Jesus ever neglect a sheep or lamb out of personal consideration for His own comfort? No, of course not. He never neglected a sheep or lamb for any reason! He perfectly ministered to the flock, even unto the death of the cross (Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:8). All Christians, and certainly Christian pastors as examples to the flock (I Peter 5:3), are to be “*followers of God...and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and gave Himself for us*” (Ephesians 5:1-2a), willing to even die for their brethren, if God so wills, as the ultimate expression of brotherly love (I John 3:16). Only the love of Christ can so constrain us (II Corinthians 5:14)!

III.

Finally, *why* should the flock desire and gladly receive such faithful shepherding? In a Divine Call the members of the congregation obligates themselves:

“To receive our pastor-elect as a minister of Jesus Christ, to accord him the love and honor which we owe him as such according to the Word of God (Hebrews 13:17; II Corinthians 5:20; Luke 10:16); to obey him in all things which he teaches us in accordance with God’s Word (II Timothy 4:2; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17); to support the ministrations required of him in this call with our diligent and faithful prayers (II Thessalonians 3:1-2); to admonish him in accordance with the Word of God, should we find him erring in doctrine or life, bearing in mind the Scriptural distinction between private and public sins (Matthew 18:15-17; I Timothy 5:19-20; Galatians 6:1); to render the discharge of his duties pleasant for him by our cordial one-mindedness and willing readiness, by our peaceable conduct, and in every other way possible (I Thessalonians 5:12-13); to defray any and all expenses incurred by him in moving to our locality (I Corinthians 9:7a); to provide for his decent maintenance in our midst according to our ability and his needs, and to that end pay him promptly and regularly an adequate salary for his work (I Corinthians 9:7-14; Galatians 6:6-7; Luke 10:7; I Timothy 5:17-18; I Timothy 5:8).

Scripture admonishes the sheep and lambs: “*And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves*” (I Thessalonians 5:12-13). “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you*” (Hebrews 13:17).

God gives us pastors “*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.*” Why wouldn't we want this? Peter admonishes us all: “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*”

(I Peter 2:2-3). Ah, here is the key: The sweet taste of God’s grace manifested in the Gospel should be so inviting, so delectable to our souls, that we should crave to have it regularly and consistently dispensed to us! When God asks: “*Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine?*” (Isaiah 28:9), every believer should cry out “Here am I, teach me!” How we should yearn to hear God’s Word regularly and consistently in the local congregation! How we should cry out with the Psalmist: “*Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house and the place where Thine honor dwelleth!*” (Psalm 26:8). “*I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord!’*” (Psalm 122:1). As a newborn babe continuously yearns for its mother’s milk, so we should yearn for the Means of Grace received from the steward of God, our Christian pastor. God’s Word is all we need; it is a complete, wholesome, soul-satisfying meal!

“But what if I do not have a local congregation to attend with a pastor chosen by God Himself to proclaim to me His Word, to administer to me His holy Sacraments, to watch for my soul, to minister to my particular needs, and to give account for me as God ordains?” Do you really need to ask? God has not ordained the local congregation and its ministry of Word and Sacrament as a mere “option” which His people may exercise or ignore according to their own choosing. He fully expects them regularly and consistently to hear the Word which goes forth out of His mouth in the preaching of His ambassadors (Isaiah 55:10-11; Luke 10:16; I Corinthians 4:1; II Corinthians 5:20; Romans 10:14ff.). If, because of purely temporal circumstances, you find yourself at such a great distance from an orthodox Christian congregation that you cannot regularly assemble yourselves together with true brethren and participate in the blessings and work of a local flock, as the Lord bids you do in the motto of this year’s convention, Hebrews 10:25, then do the right thing and “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33), making whatever sacrifices of temporal things are necessary for you to join a local flock, to participate in a local congregation, so that *its* pastor can be *your* pastor and the shepherd you need to watch for your soul! God will bless you when you put His Word and your soul’s needs first. This He promises and cannot lie! (Matthew 6:33; Titus 1:2). Choose the “*one thing needful*” as the first priority in your life (Luke 10:42). Do so because you have tasted the sweet grace of God in the Gospel (I Peter 2:3; Ephesians 2:8-9). True pastors stand ready, willingly and lovingly to do their duty as God ordains to take care of *your* soul with God’s Word. Use them as God has so gifted them to *you* in the local congregation. Do not despise preaching and God’s Word by “*forsaking the assembling of [yourselves] together, as the manner [that is, as the habit] of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the Day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:25). “*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*”

Soli Deo Gloria!