



[Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

(11) And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (13) till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, (15) but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— (16) from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

New King James Version

Sometimes, circumstances conspire to scatter Christians into small groups or even from all contact with other believers and from the ministry [Jesus Christ](#) gives to the church to equip them and encourage their growth—in the biblical metaphor, leaving the sheep without a shepherd. However, if sheep should *choose* to become "without a shepherd," they are rejecting one of the Chief Shepherd's major gifts to His flock, willfully taking themselves outside of His established order.

Sheep may choose to do this, reasoning that Christ is their Shepherd, which is certainly true. It is likewise true that our relationship with [God](#) is individual, without a man in the middle. Nevertheless, none of this nullifies the fact that Christ has gifted *human* shepherds to aid in bringing all the sheep "to the unity of the [faith](#) and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (

[Ephesians 4:13](#)). By implication, the only time a sheep of His pasture does not need an under-shepherd is when he has grown *completely* into the image of the Lamb of God.

Our Savior oversees the under-shepherds, holding them accountable for failures in their responsibilities, which there will be simply because they are human. However, to purposefully become a "sheep without a shepherd" is to put oneself in serious danger, for the Christian is then likely to turn to his own way, develop bad spiritual habits, become stuck in a rut, make himself a prey for [Satan](#), and ultimately become malnourished and spiritually diseased. He may not even realize his life is in danger—until it is too late.

Christ clearly establishes that, rather than wandering away from God's shepherds, the sheep have the responsibility to submit to the godly shepherds, not considering them infallible, by any means, but comparing their instruction with what God has already established in His Word. As [I Corinthians 11:1](#) teaches, sheep are to follow a shepherd's faith only as it complements and corresponds with the [teachings of Jesus](#). As [Acts 5:29](#) points out, "[W]e ought to obey God rather than men," whenever the two are not in alignment.

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[The Shepherd's Guidance \(Part Three\)](#)

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[Obeying God rather than men](#)

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